

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications
and other research outputs

Exploring the potential of a school council to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement in an English primary school

Thesis

How to cite:

Avieson, Craig (2013). Exploring the potential of a school council to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement in an English primary school. EdD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2013 The Author

Version: Version of Record

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Exploring the potential of a school council to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement in an English primary school

Craig Avieson

A3310654

Doctorate of Education (EdD)

Open University

Submission date: 31st October 2012

Date of Submission: 30 October 2012

Date of Award: 1 February 2013

Abstract

This thesis explores the facilitation of pupil voice and how this might impact on school improvement in an English primary school. It is underpinned by theoretical frameworks that address children's rights, voice, participation, power relations and active citizenship. Two formal mechanisms of facilitating children's voice are explored using an action research approach. Firstly, a pilot study explores the possibilities offered by a 'children-as-researchers' initiative (Kellett, 2005a). Findings from this inform the main study where the focus shifts to the potential of school councils. Two action-research cycles are used to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of both pupil voice mechanisms. Following research skills training, six mixed-ability children (aged 9 – 10 years) were supported in conducting independent research into a range of child-initiated issues that they identified. Data were collected through participant observations, a reflective journal and the actuality of the children's research. Areas of research explored by the children included: 'Why do Year 8s receive more praise than Year 5s?' 'Do boys receive more pocket money than girls?' 'In what areas of school are you more likely to be bullied?' The long-term sustainability of this initiative raises issues around time, resources and the inclusion of all children. Subsequently, cycles one and two focused on developing an effective school council system, which incorporated the principles of children-as-researchers and influenced school improvement. Data were generated through analysis of school council minutes, observations, field notes and interviews with children and staff. Four themes emerged: organisation of school council meetings, facilitating the views of all children, training for children and support from senior staff. Each of these themes was explored in further depth and eight specific adjustments to the school council were subsequently implemented and evaluated through further interviews and analysis of school council documents. Final analysis suggests that gathering the views of all children, alongside specific training for school councillors are both pertinent issues which impact upon pupil voice and school improvement. The findings provide further evidence that school leaders have a significant influence in facilitating pupil voice and active citizenship. The study highlights the challenges of maintaining a dual role as researcher and practitioner. Findings suggest that national policy and inspection frameworks need to provide better support to headteachers for school council development in primary schools since this could lead to transformative pupil voice and school improvement.

Contents

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
	Introduction and rationale	6 - 9
One	<u>Literature review</u>	
	1.1. Children's rights	11 - 18
	1.2. Children's voice	19 - 23
	1.3. Adult-child power relations	24 - 27
	1.4. Children's citizenship and school improvement	27 - 31
	1.5. Children-as-researchers	31 - 33
	1.6. School councils	34 - 36
	1.7. Summary and research questions	36 - 38
Two	<u>Methodology</u>	
	2.1. Research design and methodology	40 - 45
	2.2. Ethical considerations	46 - 48
	2.3. Participants	48 - 49
	2.4. Data collection methods	50 - 55
	2.5. Data analysis	56 - 58
	2.6. Summary of research cycles	58 - 60
Three	<u>Presentation and analysis of findings</u>	
	3.1. Pilot study	62 - 73
	3.2. Data from cycle one	74 - 100
	3.3. Data from cycle two	101 - 123
Four	<u>Discussion</u>	
	4.1. Organisation of school council meetings	125 - 128
	4.2. Facilitating the views of all children	128 - 130
	4.3. Training for children	131 - 133
	4.4. Support from senior staff	134 - 137
	4.5. Limitations of the study	137 - 138
	4.6. Summary and significant findings	138 - 139
Five	<u>Professional development</u>	141 - 143
Six	<u>Conclusion and avenue for future research</u>	145 - 150
	<u>Appendices</u>	152 - 159
	<u>References</u>	161 - 179

List of Figures

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
1.1.	Participation ladder (Hart, 1992)	16
1.2.	Participation model (Shier, 2001)	17
1.3.	Conceptualisation of Article 12 (Lundy, 2007)	20
1.4.	Power and agency (Devine, 2002)	25
1.5.	Influences on children-as-researchers (Bucknall, 2010)	32
1.6.	Summary of school council factors	36
2.1.	Action research cycles (Tripp, 2003)	45
2.2.	Proposed pilot study and research cycles	46
2.3.	Research questions aligned with data collection	55
2.4.	Summary of research cycles	59-60
3.1.	Map of school and bullying hot spots	64
3.2.	Percentage of children receiving pocket money	65
3.3.	Amount of pocket money received by gender	65
3.4.	Extracts and emerging themes from reflective journal	69
3.5.	What's going well – school council comments	75
3.6.	Areas to improve – school council comments	76
3.7.	Cause of problem – school council comments	77
3.8.	Group interviews with staff	89
3.9.	Summary of themes from cycle one	97
3.10.	Frequency of school council actions	102
3.11.	Teaching and learning – school council comments	105
3.12.	Emergent teaching and learning themes	107
4.1.	Strategic factors for senior staff consideration	136
4.2.	Significant findings from this thesis	139
6.1.	Proposed avenues of future research	146 -147

Appendices:

Appendix A	Parental consent letter	152 - 153
Appendix B	Example of children's research	154 – 156
Appendix C	Extract from interview with teaching assistants	157 - 159

Introduction and Rationale

Introduction and rationale

The rationale for this thesis began to emerge four years ago and was heavily based on my own experiences of working as a teacher in East Anglia, alongside the completion of a Masters degree in Education. My research topic had focused on middle-ability children and how they can sometimes slip through the education system relatively unnoticed. I was astonished to discover that many of the children interviewed (aged 13 – 15 years) were aware of being an ‘average ability’ student, but also stated that they preferred not being labelled or targeted by teachers and support staff. Upon reflection, I hoped to focus any future research on the ‘voices’ of children, but was uncertain about the particular angle to pursue. An exploratory approach was subsequently used during the initial stages of this thesis, which was also aligned with the Open University’s Doctorate of Education programme, as it was expected that a pilot study would precede and subsequently inform a main study.

As a recently appointed head of year, I was asked to complete an audit for ‘Healthy Schools’ status, gathering examples of ‘children’s suggestions making an impact across the whole school’. After an initial exploration, the headteacher highlighted a display of school councillor photos situated within the main reception and entrance to the school. I was informed that the school council was very effective and there were numerous examples of ‘child-initiated ideas’ within school council minutes. However, it transpired that the only example documented was the decoration of school bins in the junior playground. This example was presented enthusiastically by the headteacher, school council teacher and children, despite being initiated as a result of additional rubbish being littered around the school. I can recall other examples of tokenism throughout my teaching career, but one other which highlights this point succinctly involved the development of a new school curriculum. A colleague responsible for curriculum development spent an academic year reviewing the school curriculum, regularly consulting with senior staff, teachers and governors. This resulted in several whole-school ‘themed days’ being incorporated into the school timetable. Surprisingly, children were not part of this consultative process, despite being the recipients of the revised curriculum. Equally, parents and support staff (such as teaching assistants) were informed of the changes after they had been implemented across the school. Both of these examples increased my own awareness of the tokenistic nature in

which children are sometimes consulted within schools and I aimed to consider ways of improving the experiences for children, while remaining sensitive to the other priorities and challenges. Chamberlain et al. (2011: 4) suggested children are the 'end-users' of education, spending approximately 'a third of their waking day in education'. This underlines the importance of seeking children's perspectives about their experiences in school.

My own approach to teaching was based on an inclusive and consultative philosophy, but I was acutely aware of the challenges in dealing with larger groups of children, behavioural issues and aligning these with whole school priorities. I therefore hoped to explore the key issues around consulting with children, but also remain sensitive to the realities of school life. Furthermore, whilst employed as a teacher I had become increasingly aware of the support that children required from adults in expressing their views and I observed that the facilitation of this process varied considerably with individual teachers. I was not certain whether these differences were the result of institutional practices and senior staff influence, or the conscious choices of individual teachers. Or indeed, a combination of both. My awareness of these issues may have been rooted in my own school experiences, but my role as a 'middle manager' also required the administration and analysis of an annual pupil questionnaire, which asked children questions on a range of issues across the school. This retrospective questionnaire informed and supported the school development plan, but seemed less effective in providing an accurate and detailed account of school experiences. I was also sceptical as to whether all children understood the questions asked of them in annual questionnaires and if there were other barriers which reduced the validity of the results. The methods of gathering the views of children throughout this research process were therefore of personal and professional concern. I anticipated that children's views could be used to make significant improvements to the school, as they were the ones actually living and experiencing childhood.

One of the aims of education, cited in the '21st Century Schools' White Paper (DCSF, 2009), is to encourage responsible, confident and successful citizens. In support of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989), this thesis argues that children must be regarded as competent citizens in their own right and be fully supported

by adults during this process. Although the notion of children being citizens refers to all of the daily interactions, experiences and responsibilities, more formal mechanisms have also been created within schools, frequently aimed at enabling children's voice, participation and active citizenship. School councils are such an example, as these are frequently used as a platform to consult children on a range of schooling issues. Chamberlain et al. (2011) consulted with over 2000 children and the study suggested that 61% of children agreed that school councils were ineffective, as a result of the impact children's suggestions made upon school improvement. There may therefore be value in improving guidance and support for schools, in developing formal mechanisms of pupil voice, to ensure that children have their opinions heard and acted upon. From the outset, I therefore considered this thesis as an ideal opportunity to explore mechanisms of facilitating pupil voice, active citizenship and to highlight how this process may be linked to school improvement.

The research focus was set within the context of educational policies at national and school level, both with significant implications for headteachers, staff and children. Although schools are required to consult children on a range of matters, there is no statutory guidance in England on the methods which should be adopted. School councils are not compulsory in English primary schools and this is reflected within school self-evaluation models and revised inspection frameworks. In contrast, school councils have been compulsory in Wales since 2005 and the Welsh inspection frameworks and children's participation policies reflect this. The Scotland's Schools Act (2000) requires education authorities in Scotland to 'have regard to pupil views in decisions that significantly affect that pupil in relation to his or her school education' (Children in Scotland and University of Edinburgh, 2010a: 3). However, Education Scotland (2012a) gives further direction for Scottish schools, as school councils (sometimes referred to as pupil councils) are perceived as a key mechanism for children becoming: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Although a national comparison of school councils is beyond the scope of this thesis, the differences at national policy level outline the contextual parameters, which schools are required to work within.

The following section of this thesis comprehensively explores the relevant literature and provides a critical rationale, theoretical framework and specific focus for the research

questions. This chapter is followed by a detailed consideration of the most appropriate research design, methodology and data collection methods, with an explicit focus on a 'fit for purpose' approach to addressing the research questions and analysing the data. During the 'presentation and analysis of findings' section, data gathered through this study are presented in a cyclic and reflective manner, relating directly to each of the research questions. A discussion chapter presents the significant findings and offers an explicit discussion of how these relate to the academic literature and inform professional practice, alongside the clear limitations and boundaries of this study. Following a reflective section on how the EdD process has informed my professional practice, a concluding chapter draws together key issues from this thesis and considers future implications for research, policy and practice. This study also provides evidence of my own journey and development over the last four years, from the early stages of developing research questions, to gathering data and managing the complexities of the researcher and practitioner dual role.

Finally, I would like to emphasise from the outset that this small-scale study does not represent an 'ideal model' or 'recommended' guide on developing pupil voice and school improvement. This prescriptive approach is not deemed appropriate when considering the unique complexities of the school environment. Equally, the bounded nature and contextualised findings of this thesis are unique to one English primary school and generalisations must therefore be limited. However, this thesis sets out to highlight the complex, challenging, but exciting opportunities which exist within schools and impact upon the daily lives of many children.

Chapter One

Literature Review

Literature Review

An initial exploration of academic literature has identified the need to engage with six key areas that underpin the context of this study:

1. Children's status and rights
2. Children's voice
3. Adult-child power relations
4. Children's citizenship and school improvement
5. Children-as-researchers
6. School councils

1.1. Children's status and rights

Historically, there have been considerable changes to the social perceptions of children and subsequently, their rights. James and Prout (1990) called for the study and theorisation of children as social actors, with an emphasis on agency and accepting children as valued members of society in their own right. Uprichard (2008) utilised the terms of 'being' and 'becoming' when referring to childhood, with the latter term indicative of children lacking competencies of the adults they would become. The seminal work of James et al. (1998) outlined the changing perceptions of children's status in society, through four models of childhood representations: developing child, tribal child, adult-child and social child. More recently, Smith (2011) added 'Athenian child' to the mix. The 'Athenian child' describes the governmental model of childhood which emphasises the participatory and political aspects that derive from children's rights. Smith (2011: 31) describes this as:

a symbolic target for the relatively novel governmental mode of regulating children via strategies of participation and 'responsibilization'. Named for the Greek goddess of wisdom (Minerva in Roman mythology), the Athenian child is associated with child-rearing norms in which welfare is closely associated with autonomy, so that the child is in a sense a 'partner' in the socialization process.

The shift towards a sociological understanding of children created interest in research which ascertained children's perceptions of childhood, through voice and underpinned by a children's rights agenda. Moran-Ellis (2010: 188) stated that 'this academic challenge paralleled UK national policy and legal changes which were also opening up spaces where children could stand as subjects in their own right'. Reynaert et al. (2009) supported this notion and cited the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a catalyst in this research area.

Children's rights have become a significant field of study during the past decades, largely due to the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989.

(Reynaert et al., 2009: 518)

The UK ratified the UNCRC in 1991 and this legislation stated that children should be informed, involved and consulted about decisions that affect their lives. There are 54 Articles in total and Hart (2010: 1) suggested that the UNCRC 'provides a framework of universally-agreed moral benchmarks against which cultural values, beliefs and practices can be evaluated'. Unlike the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948), this separate legislation sets out the fundamental premise of decisions taken in relation to children. In 2009, the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the UNCRC was celebrated by 194 countries. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2007) highlights that 90 million children across the world still have no access to education and the UK is placed at the lowest of the 21 richest nations, when considering child well-being (including six inter-related themes). Exploration of all factors influencing 'child well-being' is beyond the scope of this thesis, but specific to children's rights, participation and voice is Article 12.

Article 12:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

(UNCRC, 1989)

Article 12 refers to the child expressing his or her views freely and these being given 'due weight', in accordance with age and maturity. It is frequently adults who decide if children are 'capable' of expressing a view. In addition to children experiencing their rights through the everyday practices of childhood, UNICEF (2009) and other organisations have invested considerable efforts into ensuring children are 'aware of their rights', such as the 'Rights Respecting Schools Award' (UNICEF, 2012). This has resulted in paraphrasing of Article 12 into 'child-friendly' language.

Article 12:

Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously.

(UNICEF, 2009)

Hart (2010) suggested that in addition to children being made aware of their rights, further training is required for those who educate children. Hart argues the case for 'rights education as an essential component of global citizenship which impacts upon the well-being of beginner teachers and young people' (2010: 1). It is evident that educators must therefore be aware of children's rights and create environments which facilitate these entitlements for children. This is evidently a challenging task, as educators are also required to safeguard children, follow national policies (e.g. National Curriculum), school policies (e.g. Assessing pupil progress), deliver high quality teaching and learning and meet national attainment targets. However, children's rights and teaching and learning may not need to be perceived as conflicting issues, as they could be used to complement each other, a point highlighted by Allan et al. (2007):

Children's rights could provide a framework for schools to tackle such issues relating to teaching and learning on a whole school basis, enabling children to share with adults the responsibility for coming up with solutions that are accepted by all.

(Allan et al., 2007: 8)

Through interviews with teachers and teaching assistants in an English primary school, Glazzard (2011) highlighted a similar perceived polarisation between 'inclusion' and the 'standards agenda'.

There was a strong sense of feeling that the standards agenda prevented practitioners from effectively implementing inclusion. This emerged as the strongest barrier to inclusion and teacher attitudes towards inclusion were also linked to the standards agenda. The two policy agendas were seen as oppositional rather than complementary.

(Glazzard, 2011: 59)

What is evident in both examples is that school attainment (or the standards agenda) can be perceived as detrimental to children's rights and inclusion. Embedding children's rights into the school environment at national level may support school leaders and educators in balancing this challenging and complex role. The UNCRC (1989) therefore provides a strong rationale and legislative framework for children's rights (Morrow, 1999) across UK schools. However, Lyon (2007) highlights the misleading nature of the UNCRC and subsequent publications which imply that children in the UK 'have all the rights' set out in the UNCRC, as under the laws of England they do not.

UK law does not in any of the four principal legal jurisdictions, provide any avenue to challenge a breach of any of the UNCRC rights in relation to children. The English Children's commissioner is given no brief to challenge a particular breach of children's rights under the UNCRC, because no one has such a right, as the UNCRC is not part of domestic law. The UNCRC may be better described as declarations of the interests of children and their claims to our protection and provision.

(Lyon, 2007: 150)

As a result of the UNCRC (1989) not being part of domestic law, each country within the UK has adopted and interpreted the legislation slightly differently. However, it cannot be disputed that the UNCRC (1989) provides child-specific entitlements which could be fostered across all services involving children, as it highlights the right to appropriate 'participation' (e.g. Article 12), the 'protection' of children (e.g. Article 3) and adequate 'provision' (e.g. Article 24). These have since been recognised as the three 3Ps (Alderson, 2000) and are subsequently discussed in further detail.

Participation

In 2004, the Welsh Assembly Government ran a competition (Participation Project) to produce a national definition of participation that would be easy to understand for adults and children. The winning 'sound-bite' was:

"Participation means that it is my right to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing an action that might affect me. Having a voice, having a choice."

(Pupil Voice Wales, 2012).

The involvement of children within this process is pertinent to this thesis, as despite children being amongst the highest users of state services (e.g. health and education), they are also one of the most governed groups (Hill et al., 2004). Children's participation therefore sits awkwardly within this paradox and Skelton (2008) suggests that children must be able to act as participants, if they are also seen as competent social actors. Before proceeding, it is important that further clarity is given to the term 'participation' and what different levels of participation may look like. Thomas (2007: 199) suggests that 'participation can refer to taking part in an activity, or specifically to take part in decision making'. Boyden and Ennew (1997: 33) more appropriately define participation as 'the sense of knowing that one's actions are taken note of and may be acted upon'. This being 'acted upon' is a critical component of children's participation, otherwise decisions made by children are tokenistic. Supporting this concept, Hart's (1992) 'Ladder of Children's Participation' offered for the first time, an attempt to conceptualise children's participation and indeed, considered the unique context of education. The eight-rung ladder is depicted in Figure 1.1.

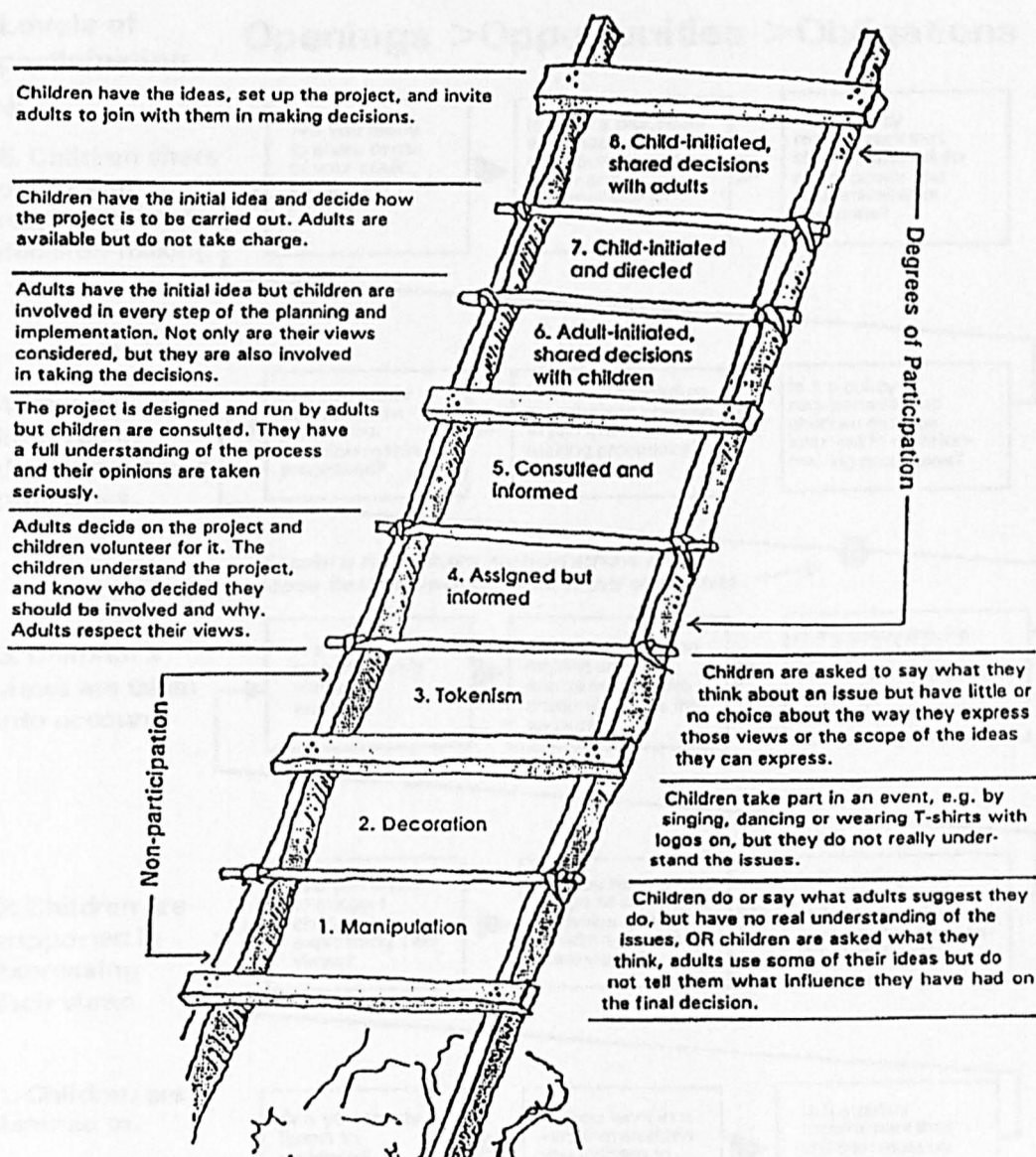


Figure 1.1. Taken from: Hart (1992: 42)

Hart's ladder was significantly influential in its own right, but it also faced many criticisms for its hierarchical and linear nature (Thomas, 2007). Franklin (1997) consequently modified Hart's model, adding two lower rungs, including 'adults rule' and 'adults rule kindly' alongside placing 'children in charge' at the top. Situational complexity and power issues were also becoming increasingly considered in adapted participation models. Shier (2001: 109) explicitly credits Hart's model, but offered an 'additional tool for practitioners' and like Treseder (1997), removed the non-participatory elements. Shier suggested five levels of participation and identified three stages of commitment at each level: openings, opportunities and obligations. The five levels of participation are shown in Figure 1.2.

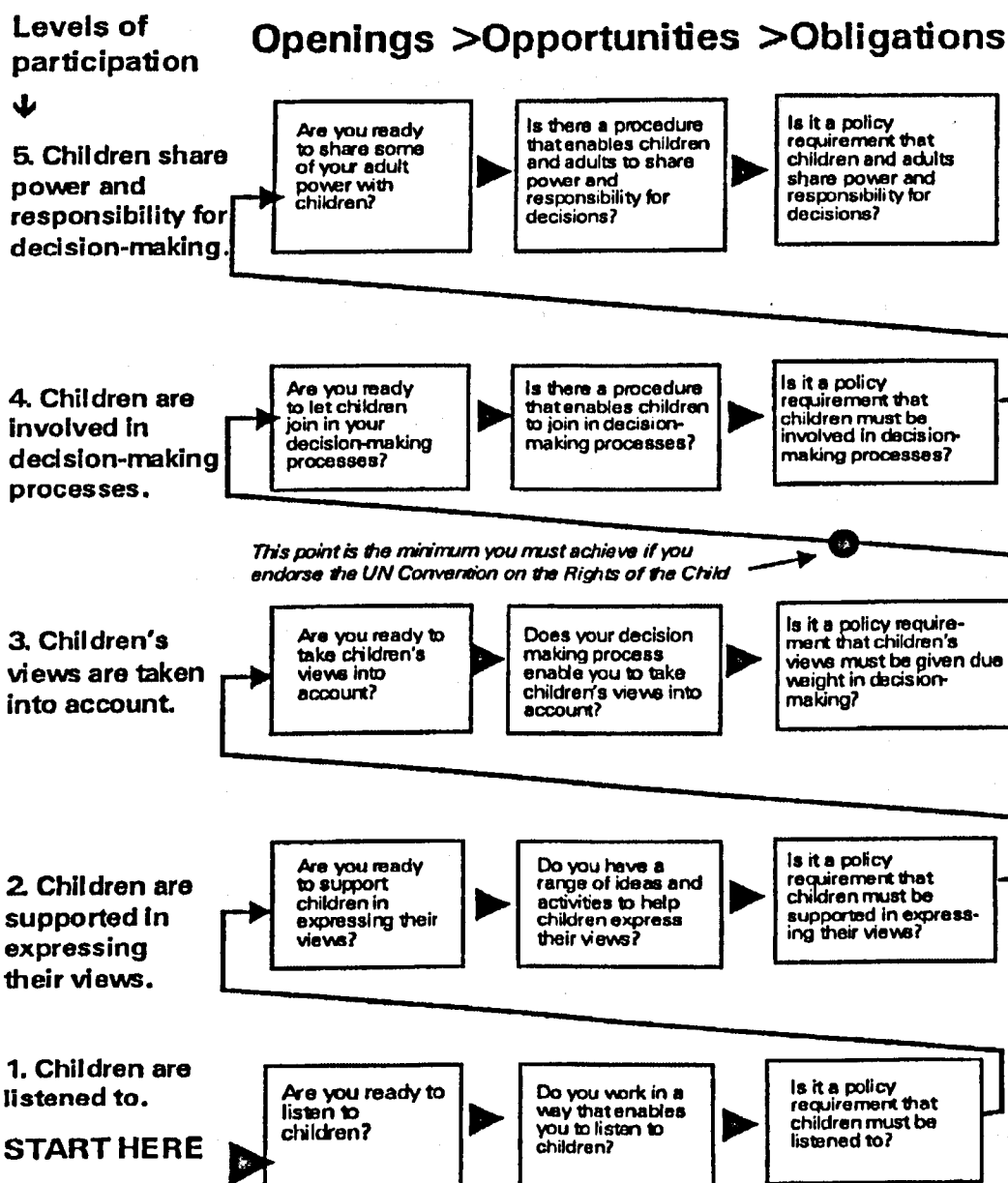


Figure 1.2. Taken from: Shier (2001: 110)

This model provided a questioning framework in which levels of participation can be easily evaluated. Shier emphasised the support or collaborative involvement of adults, but this model has been criticised by Kirby and Gibbs (2006) for not recognising the shifts of power relations between different tasks and activities. It does highlight how adults have considerable power over children's participation entitlements. Furthermore, Percy-Smith and Thomas (2010) highlighted that a 'rights-based concept of participation' is not enough in itself and suggested that children should be actively involved in the decision-making at 'all levels and in all areas' (2010: 366). The participation models provide evidence that

adults significantly influence the levels of children's participation, but the perceived competence, vulnerability and protection of children are factors which required further exploration, particularly within educational settings.

Protection and Provision

Powell and Smith (2009) explored children's participation in research and suggested that children's participation rights are compromised when they are viewed as vulnerable, or the topic is regarded as sensitive: 'Such perceptions result in stringent 'gate-keeping' procedures that prevent some children from participating in research' (2009: 124). Despite this study only involving the perceptions of twelve researchers, the results suggested that children's participation in research was determined by adult perceptions of their competence, vulnerability and power issues. James and James (2004) emphasised that adult and cultural perceptions of children can be biased and subjective. Balancing the protection of vulnerable children, whilst ensuring their rights are not restricted, is a difficult and challenging task. However, researchers and educators are in an influential position to address these issues. Davey (2009) conducted a large piece of research with 1,362 children, with one section devoted to children's perceptions of schools. Children suggested that more meaningful involvement in decision-making was required and many felt that collective participation mechanisms, such as school councils, were frequently tokenistic. For example, children wanted to be more actively involved in important decisions, such as: teacher recruitment, curriculum, policy writing and discussions of how children's views had been considered by the school. Davey's findings support Powell and Smith (2009) in suggesting that adult perceptions of competence and protection are a contributory factor, influencing children's rights in society and within educational institutions, such as schools.

The perceptions and subsequent rights of children have been developing over recent years and the revision of the Children's Act (2004), Childcare Act (2006), Children's Plan for England (2007) and the introduction of a children's commissioner reflect some of the policy changes. These revisions were partly based on the Every Child Matters (ECM, 2003) agenda and the UNCRC Special Committee findings. One of the key developments was for agencies involved with children (e.g. schools, social services, educational

psychologists) to work collaboratively and in 2003, five legislative entitlements were introduced:

1. Be healthy
2. Stay safe
3. Enjoy and achieve
4. Make a positive contribution
5. Achieve economic well-being.

(HMSO, 2003)

The UNCRC (1989) and children's rights to participation, provision and protection were clearly embedded within the ECM (2003) outcomes, although this was the first time that common aims were shared across agencies. These principles were further legislated within the Children Act (2004). Inspections of English schools by OFSTED included reference to the ECM agenda (2008-2011) affecting the institutional and policy decisions made by school leaders and the provision they subsequently provided. Increased responsibility was placed upon headteachers to evaluate their schools' strengths and weaknesses (e.g. self-evaluation forms). Further emphasis was placed upon the views of children, although the role these play within school improvement is not always explicit. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2002: 7) suggested that in UK education, 'school children are not systematically consulted in matters that affect them'. In a school context, this may involve consulting children on important issues, such as: curriculum issues, teaching and learning, timetable changes and staff recruitment. However, consultation alone is not enough. The UNCRC further suggested that the levels of participation must be 'meaningful' and 'effective'. Simply listening to the voices of children is not enough in itself and educators must therefore be clear on what constitutes 'voice' and how it can be facilitated within the school environment.

1.2. Children's voice

Whitty and Wisby (2007: 306) defined voice as:

[Including] every way in which pupils are allowed or encouraged to offer their views or preferences.

This definition provides two useful concepts that are discussed throughout this literature review. Firstly it encapsulates Shier's model of participation, as it includes every method

of participation, albeit through voice. Secondly, it supports the notion that children require adult support in expressing their voice. It is therefore argued that voice is in the gift of the adult and children subsequently have little autonomy over the exercising of their voice, as it is adults who ‘allow or encourage’ children’s views. This also raises the issue of adult awareness of Article 12, particularly those working within education. Lundy (2007) supported the view that Article 12 was dependent on ‘adult cooperation’, but also suggested that the term ‘pupil voice’ did not encompass the full extent of Article 12 and that a reliance on this term alone may result in less meaningful and effective implementations of children’s rights. Lundy further conceptualised Article 12, incorporating four key elements: space, voice, audience and influence. This is depicted in Figure 1.3.

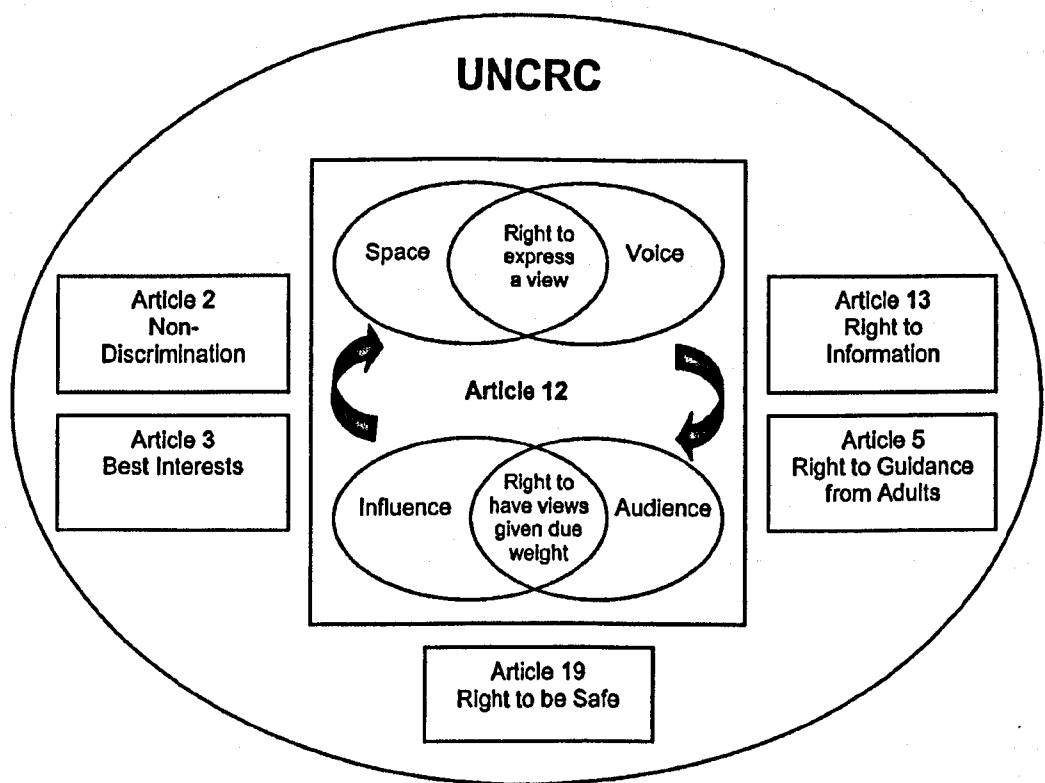


Figure 1.3. Taken from: Lundy (2007: 932)

Space and voice

Lundy (2007: 934) suggested that ‘space’ may be regarded as a ‘pre-requisite’ for meaningful engagement and refers to:

An obligation to take proactive steps to encourage children to express their views; that is, to invite and encourage their input rather than simply acting as a recipient of views if children are happy to provide them.

Alderson and Morrow (2004) supported this outlook and suggested that children's voice within schools is limited and 'muffled' at its very best. Children of different ages and abilities may require varying degrees of support in expressing a voice. Children who have Special Educational Needs (SEN) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) may therefore require additional consultation methods, if their 'voice' is to be accurately represented. Fielding (2001, 2004) highlighted how, when adults speak on behalf of children, 'misunderstanding and misrepresentation can occur'. In support of this, Barwell (2005) highlighted how language used in a classroom acts as a mechanism for carrying the meaning, rather than a social practice in itself. Supporting this notion, Conteh (2007) highlighted how the culture and context of an educational setting should be considered in depth, alongside additional language barriers for EAL children and those with SEN. Importantly, particular children may require additional support in expressing a voice and this may take many different forms: e.g. drawing, discussion, interview, research and adult-support. The entitlement to voice must be inclusive of all children, irrespective of their age and ability (Avieson, 2011). Messiou (2006) echoes this assertion, but highlights 'voice' as a catalyst for inclusion:

Children's voices can be viewed as the challenging starting point for the creation of more inclusive practices

(Messiou, 2006: 314)

Few would disagree that inclusive practice is an essential characteristic of an effective school, but Allan (2010: 206), similar to Glazzard (2011), highlights how inclusion is currently challenged by the 'fragmentation of provision' and 'economically driven imperative to raise achievement', both of which are challenges to school policy. Gordon (2011) suggests that in order to measure the efficacy of inclusion, research must be gathered from the students' perspective, as they are the recipients and participants in the inclusive process. Ryan (2009) further supported this notion and highlights the importance of actively seeking and learning from the voice of children, as an inclusive process in

itself. The concept of inclusion may therefore not only be applied to children who require additional support to have a voice, but also the facilitation of all voices across the school.

Lundy (2007) suggested that the right to voice is dependent on the ability to form a view, whether this is regarded as appropriate or not. Children may need help in formulating their views but their own voice must be regarded as being sufficient and there is little requirement for this to be translated through adult filters. Strategies in schools that look at gathering children's voice are therefore of benefit to children, but also provide an inclusive approach to school improvement and gathering the unique educational experiences of children. However, this means that there must be effective mechanisms which gather the voice of all children. For example, it may not be pragmatic to have 400 children as active members of the school council, but mechanisms which school councillors and adults use to ascertain the views of non-school council members are significantly important (Avieson, 2011). Particular children may feel that they do not have a voice in the school council, a point highlighted succinctly by a Scottish pupil (aged 11):

“It’s like a school council of pupils that decide what to say. They meet up with [the headteacher] and they say things...there’s only ten children in the whole school that really make decisions. We aren’t exactly having a decent school where everyone gets a say.”

(Allan and I’Anson, 2004: 127)

Depending on the ‘audience’ and ‘influence’, this insight may lead to school improvement. Bergmark and Kostenius (2009) used the term ‘participatory appreciative action research’. The aim is to allow children their rights to voice and expression and to use this empowering process to improve the overall effectiveness of the school. Flutter and Rudduck (2004) summarised this point rather succinctly – suggesting that pupil voice supports school improvement through ‘making a difference to pupils’ and ‘making a difference to schools’.

Audience and influence

Lundy (2007) suggested that audience refers to ‘due-weight’ and an acceptance that views will be considered by the relevant adults. For example, an effective school council must

ensure that children's views are listened to by senior leaders and are influential. Children's best interests (Article 3, UNCRC) may be a priority, but children must be regarded as competent in their own right, if their views are to have any influence on educational leaders; otherwise their voice is tokenistic. Alderson (2000) collected pupil views of school council effectiveness and it was suggested that some were a 'token' gesture and made little impact upon the school. Wyse (2001) supported this view and suggested, similarly to Lundy, that the existence of school council (or voice) is not in itself a guarantee of children's rights. Yamashita and Davies (2010) further argued that an ineffective school council may be worse than not having one at all, due to its tokenistic view of participation. However, strategic consideration of audience and influence may empower children further and reduce the tokenistic nature of 'pupil-voice' across educational settings.

One important driver for empowering children through voice is school improvement. If children are regarded as 'beings', their voices are listened to and their views regarded as pertinent, then educators and school leaders may gain rich insight into children's worlds. School improvement has further attracted promoting 'voice' for some policy makers (Whitty and Wisby, 2007). Bragg (2007: 343) confirmed this assertion and stated that 'student voice is now taking a more central role in educational policy, guidance and thinking'. Consultations with pupils on a range of matters have been shown to be effective in many schools and student councils are now increasingly being taken up by many schools; as much as 95% (Whitty and Wisby, 2007). However, Rudduck and Fielding (2006: 219) warned that 'the current popularity of student voice can lead to 'surface compliance' - focusing on how to do it, rather than why we might want to do it'. This highlights how schools must be explicit in their motivations to consult the views of children and how these may inform school improvement. This thesis focuses on providing further rationale for involving children's views within the school improvement process.

Prior to children accessing their rights, adults must create spaces, institutional structures to listen, respond and respect children as beings in their own right. This suggests that adults within educational settings must be aware of the significance of voice (Thorne, 2002) both from children's rights and school improvement perspectives. Headteachers and school leaders may subsequently make more impact across the school in establishing a culture of democracy and empowerment. Although there is little evidence to suggest that teachers are

not aware of children's rights, without whole-school approaches to pupil voice, there may be conflicting issues to consider, such as: safeguarding, inclusion, behaviour management, children's attainment and progress. These factors, alongside the overall culture and ethos of the school, may all impact upon the adult-child power relations and the subsequent influence of pupil voice.

1.3. Adult-child power relations

Devine (2002) suggested that understanding power was crucial when attempting to analyse children's rights and citizenship. Supporting this notion, John (2003) argued that although power and adult-child relations are embedded in the 'three Ps' of the UNCRC, academics should also consider the 'Fourth P' - Power. Allan and I'Anson (2004: 123) confirmed this assertion and stated 'we need a greater understanding of the complex power relations within the school and of the way in which children see themselves and their own agency'. Adult-child power relations have since been researched by many academics and Devine (2002) suggested a conceptual framework for interpreting adult-child power relations. This model (Figure 1.4) highlights the complex interrelationships that educational organisations such as schools may need to consider. Devine's model echoes Lundy's (2007) assertions, but also demonstrates that controlling of 'space' may be part of an institutional practice, as well as an individual or group of adults exercising power. These 'spaces' within schools have traditional structures and practices, alongside political and adult themes attached to them. It may be argued that some of these practices are to the benefit of children, including: child protection and behaviour management, but other practices may be repressive.

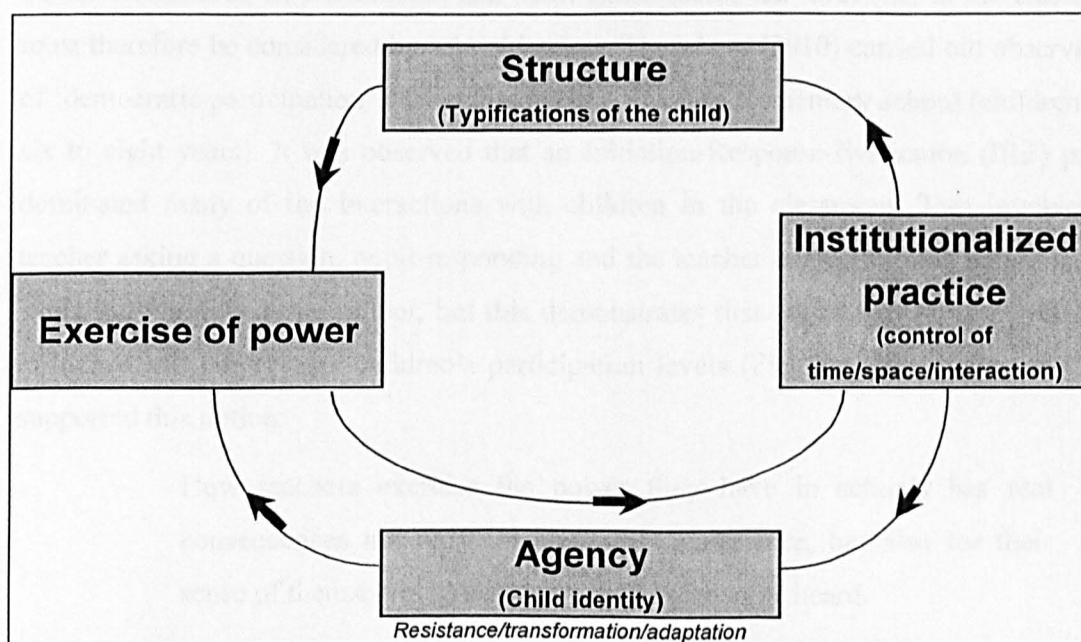


Figure 1.4. A model of the interrelationship between structure, power and agency in institutionalized practice (Devine, 2002: 306)

Devine (2002) described adult-child power relations within schools as two-fold: transformation (empowerment) and domination. The extent to which either exists may be determined by institutional and social factors. Holland et al. (2010) similarly defined power within schools as productive and repressive, depending upon the sociocultural context. It is evident that teachers may need to make conscious adjustments to their power relations with children, depending upon the institutional practices and requirements of a specific situation. Supporting the views of Devine and Holland, Cummins (2000) suggested that ‘coercive’ and ‘collaborative’ power relations were often evident within schools. Cummins (2009) further highlighted the differences at macro (institutional) and micro (class teacher) level and stated that:

Regardless of institutional constraints, educators have individual and collective choices in how they negotiate identities with students and communities. These choices are expressed as: how they interact with students and how they engage them cognitively.

(Cummins, 2009: 261)

Power relations at an institutional and adult-child interaction level (i.e. in the classroom) must therefore be considered by school leaders. Thornberg (2010) carried out observations of 'democratic participation' during lessons at a Swedish elementary school (children aged six to eight years). It was observed that an Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) pattern dominated many of the interactions with children in the classroom. This involved the teacher asking a question, pupil responding and the teacher evaluating that response. This study only involved one school, but this demonstrates that adults may have considerable influence and power over children's participation levels (Fielding, 2004). Devine (2003) supported this notion:

How teachers exercise the power they have in schools has real consequences not only for children's experience, but also for their sense of themselves as persons with a voice to be heard.

(Devine, 2003:151)

In contrast to Cummins (2009), Thornberg (2010) highlights how teachers are not necessarily 'to blame' for such interactions, similar to children, they will be embedded within a cultural, historical, institutional and social context. Consequently, the school culture, democratic systems and expectations set by policy makers and school leaders may have the most significant impact upon the adult-child power relations at institutional and individual levels of interaction. It is therefore likely that schools may be able to improve children's participation, voice and democratic empowerment through intentional adjustments in adult-child power relations. After all, children's 'sense of themselves', may be oblivious to oppression, power issues, rights and their place in modern society. Senior leaders and managers within schools are responsible for the development of whole-school policies and therefore carry much of the responsibility for encouraging a democratic culture. Watts and Youens (2007) suggested that school leadership teams were responsible for supporting pupil voice, but required openness, collaboration, collegiality and risk taking. Alderson (2008: 287) suggested that 'children are the primary source of knowledge about their own views and experiences' and school leaders are therefore in the most suitable position to facilitate this process and support children to live as citizens. Allan et al. (2007) provided a comprehensive account of one headteacher's successful attempt to extend children's participation as far as possible in a Scottish primary school. The study

highlighted the influence of one headteacher on children's rights, alongside some of the challenges of 'bureaucratic spaces' such as school councils:

"I'm beginning to look at pupil councils as not a huge impact. A lot of other children don't buy into the pupil council the way I hope they would, they come with a wish list – 'can we get, can we get?' Unless an adult drives it they can't take the initiative on things. The whole idea is that adults don't drive things. Comments back from some pupils have been that it is only two people from every year and they are not particularly good at spreading..."(Headteacher)

(Allan et al., 2007:26)

The headteacher implies that children do not possess the necessary skills to work effectively as school councillors and subsequently focuses on other children's rights mechanisms within the school. This thesis suggests that children's voice needs to be facilitated and this may include headteachers supporting children with training to operate an effective school council. The influence of headteachers must also be considered within the context and parameters of national educational policy and school inspection guidelines.

1.4. Children's citizenship and school improvement

Maitles and Deuchar (2006) suggested, like others (Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Lister, 2006), that children's citizenship was set within the background setting of the Human Rights Act (1989), growing interest in the UNCRC, establishment of the Scottish parliament, new meanings of identity and considerable political influences. In Scotland, citizenship is not taught as a discrete subject, but is a cross-curricular strand of the 'Curriculum for excellence' (Education Scotland, 2012a) for 3-to 18-year-olds. Education Scotland (2012b) highlights important links between citizenship, inclusion and participation:

Some young people feel themselves to be excluded from aspects of school and community life through their social, material or physical circumstances. These young people may not find it easy to take part in the school's provision for development of capability for citizenship. Sometimes they may not react positively to efforts to include them. It

is the school's responsibility to develop strategies to ensure that all young people benefit from their entitlement to education for citizenship. (*Education Scotland, 2012b*)

Inclusion of citizenship as a compulsory part on the English secondary National Curriculum began in 2002 (Crick Report, 1998). However, it has not been made compulsory in English primary schools and it is therefore anticipated that children 'actively' experience citizenship through everyday practices of the school. There are clearly limitations to this. Cohen (2005) discussed how children hold 'partial membership' to citizenship and are allowed to make some decisions, still subject to 'paternal authority', but have little opportunity to make and be involved with real and important decision-making. Much of the language used in describing the 'purposes of citizenship' is ambiguous and slants towards a suggestion that children are 'future citizens', a view echoed by Osler and Starkey (2006). Lister (2006: 22) called for a 're-examination of the concept of citizenship and recognition that while children may be considered citizens, in terms of legal rights and responsibilities, children's citizenship is not the same as adults'. Lister further highlighted the importance of 'being' a citizen, as opposed to 'acting a citizen' and made indirect links to 'active citizenship'. Cleaver and Nelson (2006) suggested that 'active citizenship' should be experienced across all areas of schooling and not specific to the curriculum alone.

Active citizenship

Kellett et al. (2004: 329) argued that many 'active citizenship' initiatives have still been 'adult led, adult designed and conceived from an adult perspective'. However, in some schools, children may need to learn what it means to be active citizens. This may involve developing their knowledge and understanding, through specific training on their rights and responsibilities, or other skills that empower children in being active citizens. During the early stages of developing active citizenship, this may inevitably involve adult-led support. Cleaver and Nelson (2006) suggested a need for 'active citizenship' and stated that citizenship education should be developed across four main linked contexts (school curriculum, cross/extra-curricular, the school community and wider community). Schools that see links between these contexts are potentially creating a climate for the effective

development of 'active citizenship'. This 'active process' of engagement is at the heart of what is referred to as 'active' citizenship and children must feel that their actions can make a difference (Maitles and Deuchar, 2006). A useful example of this point was Lister et al.'s (2003) study in which 110 young people were interviewed on a wide range of issues relating to citizenship, with one child stating:

"It's doing something for the community really, isn't it? Getting in with things you know, getting your point across, that's what it needs in this world, more people to be like this. Tell people what they want and what they feel should happen and what shouldn't happen"

(Lister et al., 2003: 238-9)

Although this study involved older teenagers (aged 16-18 years), this quote is still very powerful in explaining active citizenship through the eyes of a young person. It also reinforces Shier's (2001) model of participation and highlights how contributions from children must be recognised as being valid and important. As Lundy (2007) suggested, 'hearing' children's voices is not enough by itself and action must be taken to address the issues pertinent to children's lives. Children spend the majority of their childhood within education and they may learn to be active citizens throughout their time at primary and secondary school (Avieson, 2011). 'Learning to be a citizen' may require additional support, training and guidance from adults. Alongside a democratic culture within schools, other formal systems and processes have been devised to facilitate active citizenship and pupil voice, e.g. children-as-researchers and school councils. Addressing the efficacy of formal mechanisms of pupil voice may promote children's rights, voice, participation and children's decision-making across the entire school (Yamashita and Davies, 2010). However, it is also critical that these mechanisms are explicitly linked and driven from a school improvement perspective, particularly if they are going to be prioritised by school leaders.

School improvement and active citizenship

Citizenship within English primary schools is not compulsory and the overall responsibility of ensuring children experience forms of active citizenship therefore rests

with all adults within a school. However, Maitles (2010: 393) suggested that 'there was the nagging worry that the responsibility of the whole school would become the responsibility of no-one', highlighting that children are only able to experience active citizenship if adults enable this. Subsequent improvements to forms of active citizenship are therefore influenced by school leaders, as it is widely assumed that in addition to educational policy and guidance, school leaders possess the capacity for continual school improvement through self-evaluation and monitoring processes (Thoonen et al., 2012). In support of Shier's (2001) participation model, the school self-evaluation process may ensure that children's views are 'taken into account' through annual questionnaires, school councils and focus groups. But the frequency and range of issues in which children are consulted on, are determined by individual school leaders and not, national policy. In order to achieve higher levels of participation and active citizenship, school leaders must therefore create and monitor specific policies which enable children to be involved in decision making on a range of important school matters. Hamill and Boyd (2002) suggest that children's views may not always be in agreement with adults, but these are the perceptions of children and are therefore worthy in their own right. Specifically, children's views on a range of school issues provide an additional dimension which not only supports pupil voice and active citizenship, but also provides unique insight into schooling issues from the perspective of children, and may subsequently lead to school improvement.

The capacity for a school to improve further is also influenced by a range of competing school priorities. In January 2012, OFSTED revised the school inspection framework for England and focused on the following four areas: achievement; teaching; behaviour and safety; leadership and management. Consequently, data from children's attendance, progress, safety and behaviour are frequently interrogated by school leaders, highlighting strengths and areas to develop in the proceeding school term. Other school improvement factors have been highlighted by academics such as: school leadership (Robinson et al., 2008); teacher development (Joyce and Showers, 2002) and effective teaching and learning (Hattie, 2009). Furthermore, Hallinger and Heck (2011) allude to the severe consequences faced by some headteachers when schools do not meet minimum attainment and progress standards. Headteachers in English state schools are therefore placed in a difficult position, as considerable emphasis must be placed on these areas and this may inevitably lead to less time dedicated to enabling children's voice, participation rights and active citizenship.

This is in contrast to Wales, where promoting pupils' rights and listening to their views is part of the Welsh Assembly Government policy (Reid et al., 2010). This thesis suggests that ascertaining the views of children on their lived experiences at school, is critical within the school improvement process.

Strategies to improve formal mechanisms of active citizenship and voice may therefore support schools in their self-evaluation and school improvement processes, both key priorities for twenty-first century schools (DCSF, 2009). Many schools may engage with active citizenship and pupil voice from a school improvement approach and others from a children's rights agenda. It is evident that both issues must be considered and addressed equally (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). Due to the scope of this thesis, two specific vehicles aimed at facilitating active citizenship and pupil voice were considered in more depth: 'children-as-researchers' and 'school councils'.

1.5. Children-as-researchers

Alongside teachers, researchers working with children have had differing opinions about their nature of involvement. Christensen and Prout (2002) suggested that children have been identified in research as the object, subject, social actor and participant/co-researcher. Kellett (2010) suggested that research has often focused on three areas: 'on children' (e.g. developmental psychology); 'about children' (e.g. socially constructed childhoods) and 'with children' (participatory agendas and ECM). The emergence of research 'by children' has been described by Kellett (2005a) as a 'new paradigm' focusing on empowering children-as-researchers in their own right (Sinclair, 2004; Alderson, 2008; Kellett, 2011), from the initial development of children's research skills, through specific training and support, to the conducting and dissemination of children's research. Similar to children learning about their rights or citizenship, children-as-researchers provides the necessary skills for children to conduct their own research. There has been a shift in recent years from the focus on older teenagers conducting research (Fielding and Bragg, 2003), eleven- to thirteen-year-olds (Thomson and Gunter, 2006), to primary-aged children (Frost, 2007; Bucknall, 2010). These studies and others available on the Open University Children's Research Centre (www.childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk) provide evidence that with guidance, support and opportunity, children are able to produce research projects that

matter to them, are empowering and can be beneficial to the school or institution. Bucknall (2010) conducted a multiple-case study of children-as-researchers within five primary schools within the UK. The study utilised the perspectives of children and adults, to highlight the inter-related and complex nature of supporting children to conduct their own research within the primary school setting, alongside the significance of participation, voice and power relations. The model in Figure 1.5 is a summary of the issues raised. Bucknall (2010) attempted to conceptualise children’s views of the children-as-researchers initiative and provided a succinct summary of the issues faced by teachers and researchers. Although these issues were not explicitly linked to school improvement, they do offer a useful platform to build from within this thesis. If similar empowering strategies are utilised to gain insight into the lived experiences of schooling and these can be linked to school improvement, then the views of children will make a more significant impact upon school improvement.

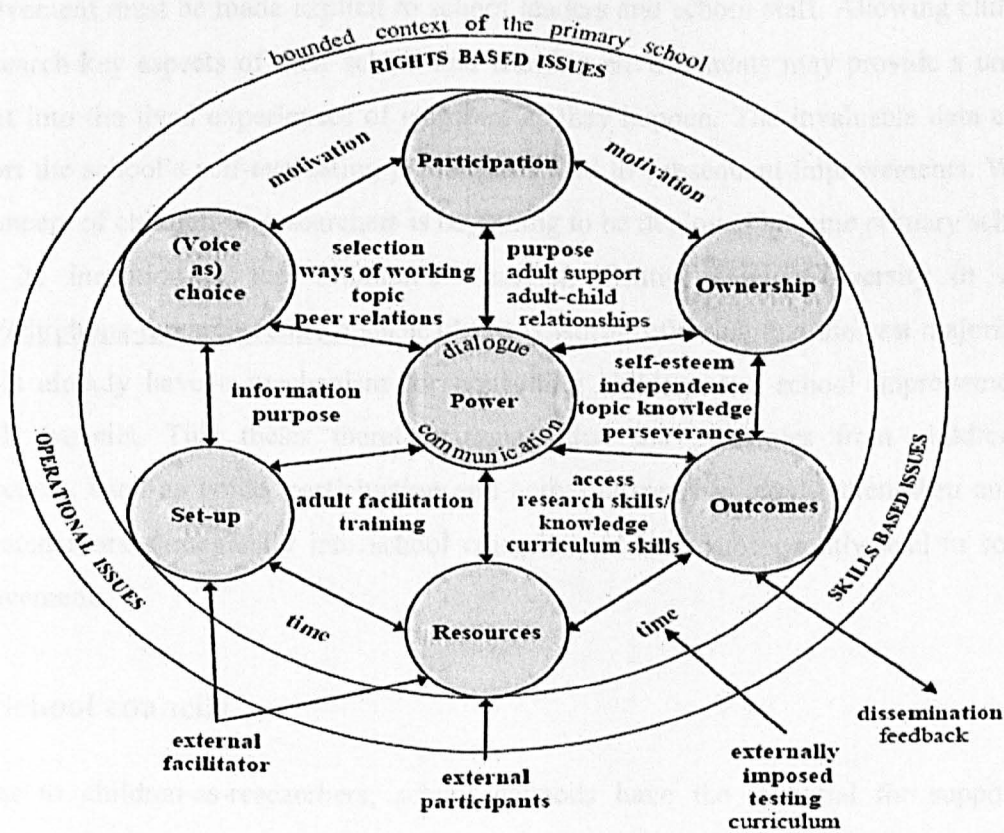


Figure 1.5. A model of the factors and processes which impact upon children-as-researchers (Bucknall, 2010: 8)

One of the limitations of children-as-researchers is the reliance on adults, particularly school leaders, being willing and able to facilitate the delivery of research skills to children. The school curriculum is heavily loaded with a wide range of subjects and legislative requirements that schools are expected to achieve and additional time and resources are therefore, rather limited. It would be difficult for a school to adopt such an intervention, unless a member of existing staff was willing and able to facilitate the training. Equally, further consideration must be given to how children-as-researchers would facilitate the voice of all children. As suggested by Lundy (2007), school leaders are still required to make available 'space' and 'time' and this is only likely if there are explicit benefits for school improvement. If the purposes of such an initiative are to empower children and utilise their perceptions to improve the school, then this has additional benefits to school leaders and is more likely to be adopted. Consequently, the link between facilitating children's voice, participation rights, active citizenship and school improvement must be made explicit to school leaders and school staff. Allowing children to research key aspects of their school and learning environments may provide a unique insight into the lived experiences of children, as they happen. The invaluable data could support the school's self-evaluating process and lead to subsequent improvements. While the concept of children-as-researchers is beginning to be deployed in some primary schools since its inception at the Children's Research Centre, Open University in 2004 (<http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk>), it is worth reflecting that the vast majority of schools already have a mechanism for consulting children and school improvement - school councils. This thesis therefore argues that the principles from children-as-researchers, such as voice, participation and active citizenship, could strengthen and be integrated more strategically into school councils and may subsequently lead to school improvement.

1.6. School councils

Similar to children-as-researchers, school councils have the potential for supporting children's rights, voice, empowerment, active citizenship and school improvement. But there are also many barriers. Furlong (2010) suggested three key factors influencing how the perspectives of learners are considered in formal mechanisms of children's voice, such as school councils. Firstly, learners who are involved as active partners in shaping their

learning experiences may develop in terms of learner engagement, self-esteem, confidence and skills. Secondly, attitudes towards children (from adults), or authenticity in consultation, will predict the approach and responses to pupil consultation. Finally, the preoccupation with academic standards may work against pupil participation, depending whether it is viewed as a positive initiative, or a 'hoop to jump through'.

Alderson (2000) highlights the link between school councils and factors affecting their effectiveness, such as: awareness of rights, adults facilitating meetings and time for councillors to give feedback to other classes. Rudduck and Fielding (2006) supported these assertions and identified three 'big issues' for school councils: power relations, inclusion and authenticity. Inclusion refers to the selection of children to represent the school council, including their abilities, ages and educational needs. Authenticity considers why staff think there is provision for a school council and what adults believe its purpose to be. Cox and Robinson-Pant (2005) ascertained teachers' perceptions of school councils and concluded that children were not always able to contribute significantly to decisions within the school and this was due to the adult-focused agendas and meetings, suggesting that school councils were utilised to feed information downwards to children, rather than the facilitation of two-way communication. Whitty and Wisby (2007) supported the views of Rudduck and Fielding (2006) in suggesting that inclusion, power relations and authenticity were key issues for school councils. However, they also cited 'training for children' as an additional factor. Similar to children-as-researchers, it is feasible that children require specific training in the roles and purposes of the school councillor, alongside effective strategies to gather and disseminate the views of others. Children in Scotland and Edinburgh University (2010a) conducted a three-year evaluation of Scottish school councils across 32 local authorities and suggested that school councils were less common in primary schools. The study also highlighted that 50% of all school councillors did not receive any formal school council training, although training for adults that support school councils was equally identified as critically important to the overall success of school councils.

Pupil Voice Wales (Welsh Assembly Government) and School Councils UK (registered charity) both provide an abundance of training resources and materials for staff and children. The focus of school council training is aimed at making children aware of their

participation rights and providing them with the necessary skills to access these within a school setting. These include training on: rights, roles and responsibilities, chairing and contributing at meetings, creating an agenda, gathering the views of other children and the dissemination of information. It is evident that considerable time and resources are required during the creation and development of a school council. Cotmore (2004: 60) highlighted this point and stated that 'time constraints for council meetings may lead to not all agenda items being covered'. Further extensions of this concept may include: time to feed back to class, time to make decisions, time allocated to facilitate pupil voice and gathering children's views across the entire school. Yamashita and Davies (2010) suggested that this inclusive concept of 'all students involved' was one of the three 'basics' required for school council impact and children's participation. Children in Scotland and Edinburgh University (2010b) highlighted the inclusive gap and communication issues between school council and non-school council members:

Communication to non-pupil council members occurs most often through newsletters, council members talking to classes and school assemblies. However, regular and effective communication is cited as a common weakness between pupil councillors and their fellow students.

(Children in Scotland and Edinburgh University, 2010b: 2)

This provides evidence that provision of pupil voice for all children is the first hurdle for school councils and supports Lundy's assertions that there must be 'space' to express a view and this 'voice' must be facilitated. I have synthesised a summary of school council literature and key themes, which provide a focus and boundary for the study reported here. This is shown in Figure 1.6, although it is evident that these five factors are interlinked.

School council Factors	Specific considerations
1. Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is involved in the school council? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are children selected? • How do all children feed into meetings? • How is information disseminated to all children and adults?
2. Power relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult-led or child-led meetings? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a set agenda? • What is the impact of children's suggestions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are important issues discussed? • Is there senior leadership involvement and influence?
3. Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are staff and children aware of the purposes of the school council? • How do staff and children perceive the school council? • What impact does the school council make on school improvement?
4. Appropriate space and time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are children given space and resources? • Are school council meetings sufficient in time? • Is time allocated for training of school councillors? • Is there time allocated for children to feed back and collect views from their peers?
5. Training for children and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are children aware of their rights, roles and able to actively engage in the school council process? • What training do children receive and what is its impact? • What training do adults leading the school council receive?

Figure 1.6: Summary of school council factors

1.7. Summary and research questions

This literature review discussed how shifting perspectives of children's status have influenced discourses on citizenship. The UNCRC (1989), ECM (2003), Children Act (2004), 'Higher Standards, Better Schools for All' (DfES, 2005) and the '21st Century Schools' White Paper (DCSF, 2009) have all impacted upon current educational practice across the UK and the significance of pupil voice within an English school environment has been outlined. Varying degrees of children's participation were explored, each emphasising the requirement for adult support. Space, voice, audience and influence (Lundy, 2007) have also been highlighted as pertinent, in relation to Article 12 of the UNCRC. Research suggests that adult-child power relations can be coercive or collaborative and exist at institutional (macro) and adult-child interaction (micro) level, but

may be heavily influenced by school leaders and whole-school policies. It is suggested that children, similar to any other marginalised group (e.g. disabled and minority ethnic groups), must be regarded as competent human beings (Lansdown, 2004), able to contribute to society as active-citizens.

Active citizenship was critically discussed, with particular emphasis on children learning about democracy and rights, through training and by experiencing them within a school setting. Children-as-researchers provides a useful vehicle for children to investigate areas of personal interest, which may lead to considerable empowerment and adult insight into the lived experiences of children. Long-term sustainability and the inclusion of all children may present considerable strains on time and resources within a school setting. However, parallels can be made between children-as-researchers and school councils, as both require specific training and adult-support and can facilitate voice, participation, empowerment and active citizenship. Furthermore, school councils already exist across many schools and may therefore provide a more sustainable and effective platform to link pupil voice with school improvement. Research has indicated that factors influencing the effectiveness of school councils are: inclusion, power relations, authenticity, appropriate time and training for children. This thesis sets out to explore these areas and other pragmatic strategies which improve the overall efficacy of pupil voice mechanisms. In light of the aforementioned review of literature, the following research questions were proposed:

Research question:

Exploring the potential of a school council to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement in an English primary school.

Subsidiary questions:

1. *Can the concept of children-as-researchers help to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement?*
2. *How effective is the current school council in facilitating pupil voice and school improvement?*
3. *What adjustments and improvements can be made to improve the effectiveness of the school council?*

This section has critically evaluated the relevant literature and provides a theoretical framework for this thesis, alongside a distinct boundary. The following chapter considers the methodology, research design, data collection and data analysis. It was important to align the research questions with suitable research methods which would be effective and reliable within a school setting.

Chapter Two

Methodology

Chapter Two

The main purposes of this chapter are to explore the research frameworks which inform this thesis and provide a clear rationale for the chosen methodology. I identify the ethical considerations and describe the participants in appropriate detail. Following this, I outline the data collection methods used to address each of the research questions. This chapter concludes with discussions around the analysis of data and a summary of the pilot study and action research cycles.

2.1. Research design and methodology

Cohen et al. (2011) suggest three distinct paradigms used within educational research: positivist, interpretive and critical theorist. At the start of my research journey, I was unaware of which philosophy and paradigm I was operating within, as I had only previously focused on exploring the research questions, a point highlighted by Fraser and Robinson (2004):

Empirical research can be conducted without the detailed knowledge of its philosophy or awareness of the different paradigms it operates under. Nevertheless, any approach to empirical research will rest upon a particular paradigm and philosophical outlook, even if unconsciously held.

(Fraser and Robinson, 2004: 59)

Schwandt (2001) suggests that interpretive researchers explore meanings in relation to actions and situations, rather than the single object of reality. The underlying philosophical framework for this thesis initially seemed interpretive. However, I also became aware that elements of a critical theorist were present in my approach, particularly in respect of participatory research and disempowered children. Cohen et al. (2011) suggest critical theory involves research 'with' people and communities, rather than doing research 'to' or 'for' them, and therefore, I seemed to fall within both paradigms.

Safford and Hancock (2011) suggested that questions, concerns and problems faced by practitioners are a unifying aspect of educational enquiry. The literature review chapter and subsequent research questions suggest a qualitative approach would be most suitable, as enquiry was a major feature (Bryman and Teevan, 2005), the focus was on an issue or problem rather than hypothesis (Creswell, 1998) and, as Maxwell (2005) argued, there were both 'practical' and 'intellectual goals'. Burgess et al. (2007) supported this assertion, but also raised the issue of validity and suggested that 'logical consistency and comprehensiveness' should be embedded within the research design and methodology. The research questions were focused within an educational context and it was therefore important from the outset that a suitable approach was adopted. DeVaus (2001) highlighted the importance of aligning the research design with the research questions, to ensure appropriate data are generated. Cohen et al. (2011) further suggested a 'fit for purpose' approach. It was anticipated that the complex nature of investigating the research questions would be most suitably addressed in a naturalistic context, such as a school. The research questions were:

Research question:

Exploring the potential of a school council to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement in an English primary school.

Subsidiary research questions:

1. Can the concept of children-as-researchers help to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement?
2. How effective is the current school council in facilitating pupil voice and school improvement?
3. What adjustments and improvements can be made to improve the effectiveness of the school council?

Methodology

Creswell (1998) identified five research traditions within educational research: biography, phenomenology, grounded-theory, ethnography and case study. Cohen et al. (2011) added action research to this list. An extensive review of the literature suggested that 'case study' (Yin, 2008) and 'action research' (Reason and Bradbury, 2008) approaches were the most pertinent in addressing the research questions and therefore warranted further in-depth investigation. After due consideration, action research emerged as the more appropriate.

Stake (2000: 437) suggested that case studies involve interest with individual cases and not by particular methods of enquiry. The research questions suggested this study needed to go beyond the boundary of a single case to draw on wider theory and practice and needed the flexibility of a reflective process to facilitate an exploratory approach to problem solving. As an employed teacher throughout this study, I inevitably had a dual role in the research process, as practitioner and researcher. A more reflective and cyclic process that incorporated contextualised factors was therefore required, such as my own influence on the study. Yin (2008) suggested that when a researcher has direct control over participant behaviour, then a case study is not appropriate. Cohen et al. (2011) suggested that case studies were pertinent when researching 'unique instances'. As an existing practitioner, I was aware of the fluid and dynamic nature of schools and it was anticipated that flexibility would be required in any approach to addressing the research questions. At the early stages of this research project, it was envisaged that the research questions needed to be addressed in chronological order and over a substantial period of time. This, combined with consideration of my own influence and school complexities, suggested a cyclic approach to the methodology, with exploration of each subsidiary question leading to the next. It was envisaged that a pilot study would help to refine the research focus, and as the second and third subsidiary questions related to an evaluation and intervention, then an action research approach was deemed to be the optimal approach.

Action research

Similar to a case study, action research is neither a technique nor a method. It has an emphasis on practice and problem solving, thus linking research to practice – something fundamental for any teacher. Reason and Bradbury (2008: 4) defined action research as:

a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.

This definition supported the emancipatory and reflective processes involved, alongside school improvement and linking practice to research. Blaxter et al. (2002: 69) suggested seven criteria which distinguish action research from other methodologies: educative, deals with individuals as members of a group, problem focused and context specific, involves a change intervention, aims of improvement and involvement, cyclic process and those involved are participants in the change process. It was evident that all seven criteria supported my three subsidiary research questions. Cohen et al. (2007: 297) suggested that action research can be a 'small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention'. This supports the research questions and, as suggested by Zuber-Skerritt (1996: 85), 'action research should be critical (and self-critical), collaborative inquiry by reflective practitioners'. The term 'Praxis' can be described as 'action informed through reflection and with emancipation as its goal' (Cohen et al., 2007: 302). This reflective cycle provides a mechanism to consider emergent issues throughout the pilot study and build these into the planning of two further research cycles. Cohen et al. (2011) cite numerous ways in which the steps of action research have been analysed beginning with action research foundations: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. McNiff and Whitehead (2002: 71) provided a detailed breakdown of action research and suggested eight distinct stages. Each of these has been related to the three research questions.

1. Review current practice – e.g. evaluation of children-as-researchers in influencing pupil voice and school improvement.
2. Identify an aspect that you wish to improve – e.g. following evaluation of children-as-researchers, identify opportunities and barriers for pupil voice and school improvement, which can be embedded within the school council systems and processes.
3. Imagine a way forward in this – e.g. gather data and ascertain the views of children and adults in further developing the school council.
4. Try it out – e.g. after consultation, implement the revised school council changes and modifications.
5. Monitor and reflect on what happens – e.g. gather data and consult with children and adults on the noticeable improvements, limitations and feasibility of school council modifications, and their influence on pupil voice and school improvement.
6. Modify the plan – e.g. make additional refinements and recommendations in light of further observations and analysis.
7. Evaluate the modified action – e.g. assess whether the school council improvements further facilitated pupil voice and school improvement.
8. Repeat the cycle – e.g. monitor on an on-going basis as part of the school self-evaluation process.

McNiff and Whitehead's (2002) model highlights the requirement for a systematic and logical chain of events that are each informed by the previous one and support the progressive sequence of the research questions. Reflexivity within action research must also be considered, particularly considering my own role as a researcher, participant and teacher. This point is concisely highlighted by Cohen et al. (2011: 359).

What is being required in the notion of reflexivity is a self-conscious awareness of the effects that the participants-as-practitioners-and-researchers are having on the research process, how their values, attitudes, perceptions, opinions, actions and feelings are feeding into the situation being studied.

Koutselini (2008) carried out an action research study on the reflective development of staff at a pre-school in Cyprus. Staff were asked to attend meetings and keep diaries about anticipated problems at school – curriculum or pastoral. Although the study only involved sixteen teachers, the process (during group discussions) of identifying specific problems in school, followed by a plan, action, observing and review, all proved to be successful. It was suggested that open discussions and self-reflection facilitated conceptual changes and improvements in reflexivity. Just by being part of the process allowed them to remain more positive and open to change. As Brydon-Miller et al. (2003: 25) appropriately suggested, ‘action research is not simply about doing good, it is about doing things well’ and something of particular significance to any school. It was important from the outset that my own reflexivity fed into the research process at frequent and regular intervals and was not only considered at the end of the research process. Both Zuber-Skerritt (1996) and Tripp (2003) devised more cyclic models of action research incorporating the ‘plan, act, observe and reflect’ principles, alongside identification of key stages of action research.

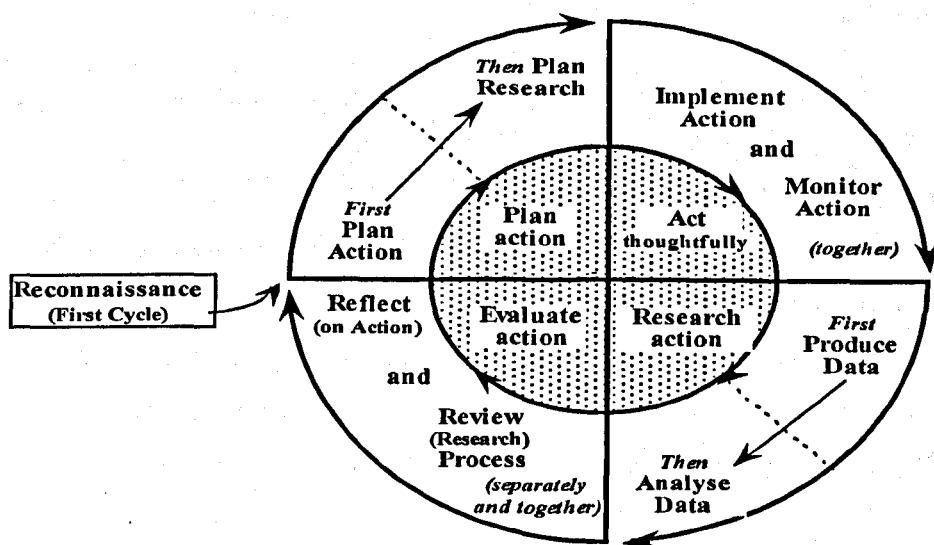


Figure 2.1– Action research cycle: taken from Tripp (2003)

Tripp’s model (Figure 2.1) suggests a more cyclic process and indicates that the action research process can be repeated more than once during a research project, suggesting that the subsidiary research questions may be broken down into distinct but interlinked cycles. Representation of the thesis research process as mini-cycles provided a sequential and logical chain of events, with reflections informing the next cycle. This is depicted in Figure 2.2.

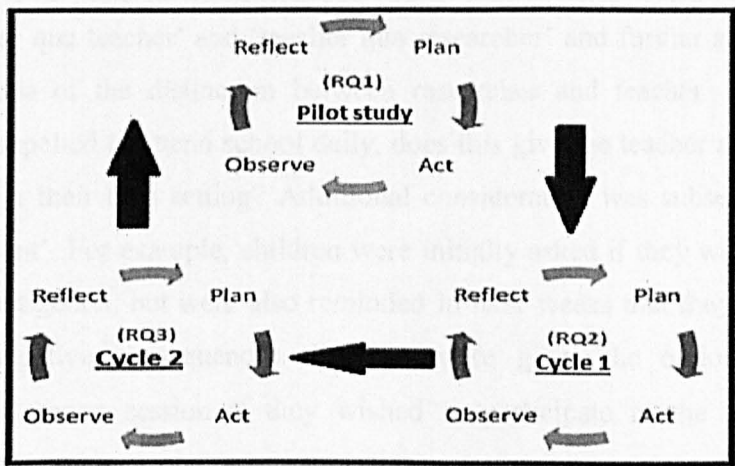


Figure 2.2. Proposed model and summary of research cycles

It was envisaged that the pilot study would provide additional insight into pupil voice and school improvement and cycles one and two would build upon these foundations. However, the specific methods of collecting data could not be considered until ethical considerations were explicitly reviewed.

2.2. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were of particular significance, as the study reported here involved working with children. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) suggests that all educational research should be conducted within an ethical respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values, quality of educational research and academic freedom. The ethical considerations are discussed throughout this thesis, as they are an integral component of the entire process. Research ethics is defined by the ESRC (2006) as:

referring to the moral principles guiding research, from its inception through to completion and publication of results and beyond.

Informed consent

This thesis involved a pilot and main study and therefore, informed consent was required for both. Voluntary and informed consent was obtained from the headteacher, teachers, pupils and pupils' parents at the start of the research process (Appendix A). The consent letter was designed in support of Oates's (2006) fifteen recommendations for obtaining parental consent. Specifically related to action research, Cohen et al. (2011) questioned the issue of 'teacher qua teacher' and 'teacher qua researcher' and further suggested that we must be cautious of the distinction between researcher and teacher. For example, as children are compelled to attend school daily, does this give the teacher automatic right to research them in their own setting? Additional consideration was subsequently given to 'informed consent'. For example, children were initially asked if they were happy to take part in the investigation, but were also reminded in later weeks that they could withdraw without any negative consequences. Children were given the option of voluntarily attending an afternoon session if they wished to participate in the research project. Ensuring that children in the school council did not feel they were doing a bad job or were incompetent was also considered at the start of this study. Children were informed that the focus was on improving the school council and how they were in the best position to support this process. Following formal letters of consent, parents were also spoken to (by phone) and asked if they had any questions about the research, or would like to discuss it further. At all stages of data collection, children and adults were reminded that they could withdraw consent at any time. One important ethical consideration was to ensure that the headteacher and teacher who led the school council did not feel threatened or challenged by my research, as the thesis findings were not intended as a reflection of their professional competence. It was therefore critical from the outset that open and honest discussions with the school council teacher and headteacher made these concerns explicit to all. As a result, a brief outline of my research was given to all staff during an after-school staff meeting.

Data storage and adult supervision

Ethical implications for storing data were considered and the necessary steps to safeguard children were taken. After consulting with the school ICT manager, it was agreed that a 'research folder' would be created on the school network drive. This folder was only

accessible by myself (due to password system) and a portable USB key (with password encryption) was also utilised, to transfer temporary files to and from the school system. Field notes were not seen by children or staff at the school, as they inevitably contained personal thoughts and information. Moreover, all school documents, school council minutes, field notes, and data were kept in a locked office. All children involved required adult supervision at all times of the research process. An enhanced CRB certificate was already in place and the school classroom (for data collection) was in public sight of other classrooms. Where possible, an additional member of staff was present.

One of the most important pieces of data within the study reported here were the views and issues raised by children at the school. These issues may or may not be related to the proposed research questions and may emerge through observations, field notes, informal discussions and children asking questions of other children. Consideration of reactions to children's comments from other children and adults was therefore considered throughout the study reported here. This included adult supervision and consistent support throughout all stages of the research process. For confidentiality purposes, all names presented within this thesis are pseudonyms and specific details of both schools have been adjusted accordingly.

2.3. Participants

The study reported here involved participants from two different schools because I moved school to take up an assistant headteacher post part-way through my EdD. The pilot study in school 'A' was aimed at gaining additional insight into pupil voice and school improvement, through a specific focus on children-as-researchers. It was envisaged that this insight would access authentic child voice and raise issues that could then be taken forward into the main study. Thus data from school 'A' subsequently informed the direction and focus of the main study (school 'B'), which considered the facilitation of pupil voice and school improvement through school council mechanisms and processes. The pilot and main study were significantly interrelated, as voice, active citizenship and school improvement, were common themes throughout, alongside my own dual role as researcher and practitioner. It was also evident that each school had a unique context, which needed to be considered during the presentation and analysis of findings.

School A

Participants from school 'A' were selected from my school of employment at the time, where I was a head of year and class teacher. Data were collected between September 2009 and July 2010. This was a mixed-sex middle school (aged 9 – 13 years), situated in Suffolk. The oldest 'primary aged' pupils in the school (Year six: aged 9-10) were selected, as the scope of this thesis was on primary-aged children. The selection of participants was limited to a Year six class, who were available when I had PPA (planning, preparation and assessment) time. All children (28 pupils) were invited to an introductory session in which the children-as-researcher's project was introduced, alongside discussions of the mode of delivery and support available. Twelve children voluntarily attended the introductory session and six were randomly selected (four girls and two boys) and in accordance with my own availability. Written consent from parents and children, in addition to a telephone conversation with all parents followed, prior to final confirmations. The selection of the participants was a significant ethical issue to consider, as it was clear that no favouritism could be demonstrated.

School B

Participants from school 'B' were selected from my school of employment where I was an assistant headteacher and class teacher. Data were collected between September 2010 and April 2012. This was an inner-city mixed-sex primary school (aged 3 – 11 years), situated in East London. The school had approximately 416 children. The senior leadership team consisted of a headteacher, deputy head and two assistant headteachers (including myself). There were 18 teachers and 29 support staff. All children in the school (100%) had English as an additional language, although there were no significant language barriers for children within this school, as children spoke English from an early age and were above national average in Literacy and Numeracy in KS1 and KS2 (OFSTED, 2009). In total, 22 children made up the school council (aged 7 – 11 years) and members were made up from two representatives from each class. The headteacher had oversight of the school council, but weekly meetings and general organisation were supervised by one of the school teachers. For confidentiality purposes, the school name and names of all staff and children were changed to protect identity.

Following the consideration of ethical issues and participant details, it was important to consider which data collection methods would generate appropriate data for answering the research questions.

2.4. Data collection Methods

Lee (2009: 76) suggested that 'you should attempt to be as clear as possible about what your data are and how you are going to go about analysing them, before you set out'. It was also likely that as key issues arose, alternative ways of collecting and analysing data would be required. This further supported a multi-cyclic action research model. McNiff and Whitehead (2002) offered a partial resolution to data collection concerns and suggested that although lots of data may be gathered during the early stages of action research, this may not be relevant later and could be disregarded. It would be much easier to disregard any unused data at the end of the study reported here. Six key areas had arisen from the literature review and specific questions had developed from these. It was important that any data collected would answer these research questions and the choice of data collection methods was therefore crucial. A range of data collection methods was subsequently explored in further depth.

Research produced by children

Judah and Richardson (2006: 78) stated that 'the criteria by which the outcomes of [action] research are measured must emerge from the participants themselves'. One of the most important pieces of data collection in this study would therefore be the actual research produced by children, as this would highlight active citizenship, pupil voice and principles to consider during the evaluation of the school council effectiveness. Pupils would also choose how they reported their findings, e.g. written reports, oral presentations, videos, songs or other modes. This process could demonstrate the children's ability to conduct empirical research and engage as active citizens – of significant importance to the school council processes and school improvement. Feedback on children's research could also be ascertained from pupils themselves, their peers (e.g. student council), staff and parents. This would ensure the appropriate dissemination of their work. In support of the literature review findings, careful consideration was given to the adult filters used in evaluations of

children's research. However, the link between children as active citizens and school improvement required further exploration and consideration.

Participant observations – from field notes

Gay et al. (2006) suggested that participant observations are useful in allowing researchers to observe subjects in their normal environment. Clough and Nutbrown (2002) supported this view and suggested that observations can be one of the most powerful research methods and have significant impact on qualitative studies. Whilst working as a researcher and teacher, it was envisaged that I would be able to observe participants during children-as-researchers' sessions and school council meetings and record this information in the form of field notes. McNiff and Whitehead (2002: 94) stated that 'you would keep notes of the situation 'in the field' as important instances of critical incidents'. Field notes would also include any personal and general observations (Scott, 1990) within the school environment. For example, noting a particular response from staff and colleagues, or conflicting views from observations and school council documents. Keeping explicit notes of these incidents would allow continuation of the action research cyclic process and explicit discussion of my own observations and thoughts. This also supported my own professional development as a practitioner.

Reflective journal

A reflective journal (personal research diary) facilitated my own reflection of the research process, professional development and other issues experienced as a researcher and teacher. Introducing children-as-researchers and evaluating school council issues from a pupil voice and school improvement perspective was a challenging task and journal extracts may have provided evidence of this, alongside personal and professional reflections. McNiff and Whitehead (2002) suggested that when using a journal for self-reflection, two columns could be used: 'what I did' and 'what I learned'. Chandler and Torbet (2003) supported this view, although the reflective journal was also intended as a method of recording more complex research issues as they occurred, including responses from colleagues, the influence on my professional role and barriers to the research process. Without field notes and a reflective journal, many of these issues may have been difficult to recall in detail, at a later date. The journal therefore provided a timeline in which issues

raised could be considered within the context of specific research and professional activities at that time.

Documents

Blaxter et al. (2002) distinguished between using documents as primary or secondary data and suggested that almost all researchers use and analyse documents to some degree. More specifically, minutes from school council meetings were recorded each week and copies kept within a main school folder. These records of meetings provided a historical representation of pupil voice in the school council, alongside identification of topics and issues frequently discussed. The school council documents were made available to parents and staff on a weekly basis and no confidential information was disclosed within them, including names of adults or children. Furthermore, identification of themes and trends from the school council minutes also supported the subsidiary research questions, evaluating the effectiveness of the school council. A limitation of this method and the school council documents was that the context of discussions may not have been captured within these notes, nor did they present insight into the adult-child power relations. However, it was likely that many primary and secondary schools maintained such records of school council meetings and it was therefore envisaged that further analysis of these documents may be a useful starting point, which could be adopted by other schools aiming to facilitate voice and school improvement.

Questionnaires

Clough and Nutbrown (2002) suggested that whilst questionnaires allow researchers to survey a population of subjects, they do not provide real depth to answers. This lack of depth and, indeed the exploratory and reflective approach to this study, seemed not to suit the use of questionnaires, especially at the initial stages of data collection. However, questionnaires may be used to pick up trends (McNiff and Whitehead, 2002; Cohen et al., 2011) and this method would for example address school council 'training for children' as children could be asked specifically about their awareness of rights, roles and responsibilities. However, their understanding of the questions and context would not be guaranteed. Of particular significance to this study was 'voice' and that adult-designed questionnaires may hinder children's voice, through adult filters and misinterpretation.

Questionnaires may have provided an opportunity to ascertain what staff understood about children's rights and their perceptions of school council meetings and processes. However, it was also clear that these complex issues required exploring in more depth. Burgess et al. (2007) highlighted how questionnaires may seem like a quick and easy solution to collecting data, but from the outset, questionnaires for staff were not considered a suitable method to address the research questions. However, questionnaires were not completely ruled out from this thesis, as child-devised questionnaires could be used as part of the children-as-researchers initiative, e.g. for their own research investigations. Questionnaires were therefore not planned for from the outset, but like all other data collection methods, were an option available to children when conducting their own research. It was also envisaged that interviews with children would provide some of the most valuable data, which addressed the three subsidiary research questions.

Interviews

In qualitative research, interviews can be used in two ways: as a means of primary data collection or in support of other methods employed (Bogdan and Biklen, 2002). It was apparent that interviews would provide a means of specifically addressing the research questions, particularly the children's perceptions of the school council. In support of the literature review, gathering the unique views of children was at the heart of this study. Specifically, interviews would allow children (and adults) to discuss the efficacy and impact of children-as-researchers, the school council and how they could be further improved. McNiff and Whitehead (2002: 96) suggested that interviews 'capture the lived response of people', something paramount to this study. Rubin and Rubin (2004) stated that semi-structured interviews allowed a researcher to experience first-hand the perspective of others. Cohen et al. (2007) further suggested that group interviews would be useful when participants have been working together for a period of time and have a similar experience, i.e. school children and staff within one educational organisation. A semi-structured approach would provide children with more freedom for expression (autonomy) and could not be easily addressed through other methods (Fontana and Frey, 2000). Ethical considerations were also significant here as it was anticipated that children's honesty may be more forthcoming with a different interviewer from myself. However, my own understanding of pupil voice and school improvement allowed me to ask specific

questions which would address the research questions. The reflective and cyclic approach to this thesis was aimed at acknowledging the bias and subjectivity that I would bring to interviews and during the data analysis. Children were made aware that the interview was confidential, tape-recorded and would only be heard by myself and two supervisors. Children were also informed that they could leave the interview at any time and there would be no negative consequences. In addition to interviews with adults within the school environment, interviews with the headteacher and school council teacher could offer further insight into the school council effectiveness from a school improvement perspective, alongside assessing the feasibility of proposed modifications and improvements. It was important that these interviews were conducted in an ethically safe manner and that staff members did not feel threatened, diminished or concerned over any responses. As a result, I decided that staff would be informed of the themes and areas for discussion prior to the interviews taking place. A further professional complexity was considered, as I was the assistant headteacher and directly line-managed the school-council teacher. Consideration of our own professional and research relationship was subsequently explored throughout the study reported here. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder for further analysis and to allow a free-flowing conversation to take place.

Summary of data collection methods

A multiple mixed-methods approach was used to specifically address the three research questions. Below is a summary of the types of data collected throughout this thesis.

- Children's research findings.
- Observations of children conducting their own research - supported by field notes.
- Reflective journal.
- Documentary evidence – school council minutes.
- Observations of school council meetings.
- Interviews with adults.
- Interviews with children.

It was essential that appropriate data collection methods were aligned with the three subsidiary research questions. However, Blaxter et al. (2002) highlight the importance of not being too 'rigid' during the research planning process, as this may not allow for

changes in direction and focus. Figure 2.3 subsequently depicts the intended model of data collection, aligned with the three research questions.

Subsidiary Research Questions	Proposed Data Collection Method
<p><u>Pilot study</u></p> <p>Can the concept of children-as-researchers help to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement?</p> <p>↓</p> <p><u>Cycle one</u></p> <p>How effective is the current school council in facilitating pupil voice and school improvement?</p> <p>↓</p> <p><u>Cycle two</u></p> <p>What adjustments and improvements can be made to improve the effectiveness of the school council?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Observations of children conducting their own research - supported by field notes. 2. Children’s research findings. 3. Reflective journal. 4. Documentary evidence of school council minutes. 5. Observations of school council meetings. 6. Interviews with children. 7. Interviews with adults. 8. Interview with headteacher and school council teacher.

Figure 2.3. Summary of research questions aligned with appropriate data collection methods.

2.5. Data analysis

Cohen et al. (2011: 537) suggested 'qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data: in short, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities'. In support of this notion, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that qualitative data analysis involves three sub-processes: data reduction, data display (or organisation) and conclusion, drawing and verification. A reductive approach involved breaking data into clusters, themes and concepts, which also provided a means of adjusting and refining data collection methods. This was adopted throughout this study, as making subtle refinements would directly impact upon the next action research cycle and address the subsidiary research questions.

Data organisation and presentation

Careful consideration of the different methods of presenting the data would make a significant impact on the presentation and analysis of findings. Cohen et al. (2011) suggested seven ways of organising and presenting data analysis:

1. **By groups of participants** – Where respondents give similar answers; e.g. children-as-researchers group, or school council members.
2. **Individual participants** – total responses of one individual; e.g. interview with headteacher and/or school council teacher.
3. **Theme or issue** – present data that relates to a particular theme; e.g. barriers to children's voice from the literature review.
4. **Research question** – draws relevant data towards the issues and concerns; e.g. three subsidiary research questions.
5. **Instrument** – all of children's research presented, followed by observation data; e.g. school council themes, followed by observations and interviews.

6. **One or more case studies** – comparisons or identification of key features; e.g. relating themes/incidents to other schools.
7. **Narrative** – chronology, logical or thematic analysis; e.g. my own reflective journal and self-reflection stages following each action-research cycle.

Cohen et al. (2011) highlighted the possible pitfalls of presenting data in themes that were already predetermined, due to loss of integrity in data, de-contextualised data and being unresponsive to additional factors. The themes identified in Figure 1.6 were based on a review of the academic literature and were used to inform data collection methods. However, it was not intended that there would be a reliance on these themes for data analysis, as other themes may emerge unconstrained from the data. Presenting the data in response to the three research questions and action research cycles appeared to provide the most logical and sequential approach. Furthermore, the 'narrative' method of presenting data would also support the three reflective stages, following the pilot study and both action research cycles (Figure 2.2). The action research cycles support breaking the data collection methods, analysis and reflections into manageable and sequential stages. These link to the three subsidiary research questions and allow frequent reflections and ensure that each cycle informs the next phase of research.

Analysis of themes

Atkinson and Coffey (1997) suggested that searching for underlying themes is particularly useful and it was clear that these emergent themes could be gathered from children's research, school council documents, observations and field notes. Identification of themes and key issues would provide useful points for discussion during the focus group interviews. It was crucial that these themes emerged from the raw data and were corroborated using numerous methods. Silverman (2006) supported this view and suggested a useful method of analysing free-flowing text (interviews or diaries) is to find common themes and then record their frequency. This has the benefit of keeping the data as rich as possible (Wolcott, 1994), but still manageable. Gay et al. (2006) suggested this could be done in a three-stage approach: reading/noticing, describing and classifying. Whilst it is clear that these stages are useful in terms of 'data analysis', they do not make

explicit the requirement for 'data interpretation'. Bogdan and Biklen (2007: 159) make a clearer distinction, stating that 'data interpretation refers to developing ideas about your findings and relating them to your literature and broader concerns and concepts'. This analysis and interpretation are made more challenging through the varying types of data used in this particular study - e.g. observations and school council documents, field notes and interviews. Moreover, these identified themes must then be interconnected and related to the key concepts and themes of the literature review, whilst also remaining open to changing and new emerging themes.

Summary of methodology

This chapter set out to explore the proposed research questions and provide a clear rationale for a research design, methodology and data collection methods. It was argued that through a qualitative approach, an action research approach would be the most suitable method in addressing the research questions, in my dual role as researcher and teacher. A range of data collection methods was discussed, with further justification for the use of observations, field notes, school documents and interviews with children and staff. Ethical guidelines and data analysis were considered further and a reductive approach to analysis was deemed most suitable. This would allow the management of large amounts of qualitative data, whilst still identifying common themes and concepts. Relevant inferences would be gathered from these data sources and related to the literature review and subsidiary research questions. Both schools, headteachers, staff, parents and children were identified and informed. Parental and pupil informed consent was obtained at the outset and throughout the study. Finally, it was suggested that a pilot study and two micro-cycles of action research would further facilitate the action research approach and self-reflective process. Data are presented in relation to each cycle, with my own narrative running concurrently. A final summary of intended data collection methods is given below in Figure 2.4.

(Pilot study)
Can the concept of children-as-researchers help to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement?
↓
<u>Data reduction</u> - data collected from children's research, participant observations, field notes and reflective journal.
↓
<u>Data display</u> - data collection methods are presented in data sets, with emergent themes being presented.
↓
<u>Analysis/drawing conclusions</u> - evaluation of children-as-researchers linked to pupil voice and school improvement. Consideration of additional challenges and limitations faced during the pilot study, alongside principles which could be developed more effectively within school councils – cycle one.
↓
<u>Reflection</u> - additional considerations of personal, professional and other factors influencing the research focus and data, including professional challenges and issues to explore during cycle one.



(Cycle 1)
How effective is the current school council in facilitating pupil voice and school improvement?
↓
<u>Data reduction</u> - data collected from school council documents (minutes over one school term), observations of school council meetings, group interviews with children (school council and non-school council members), group interviews with staff, individual interviews with school council teacher and headteacher.
↓
<u>Data display</u> - data collection methods are presented in data sets, but with emergent themes being highlighted throughout.
↓
<u>Analysis/drawing conclusions</u> - evaluation of school council effectiveness linked to pupil voice and school improvement. Emergent themes are considered in light of the pilot study findings and possible intervention strategies in cycle two.
↓
<u>Reflection</u> - reflection of cycle one. Additional consideration of other factors affecting the data, including my own influence and personal reflections, professional tensions and issues to consider further in cycle two.

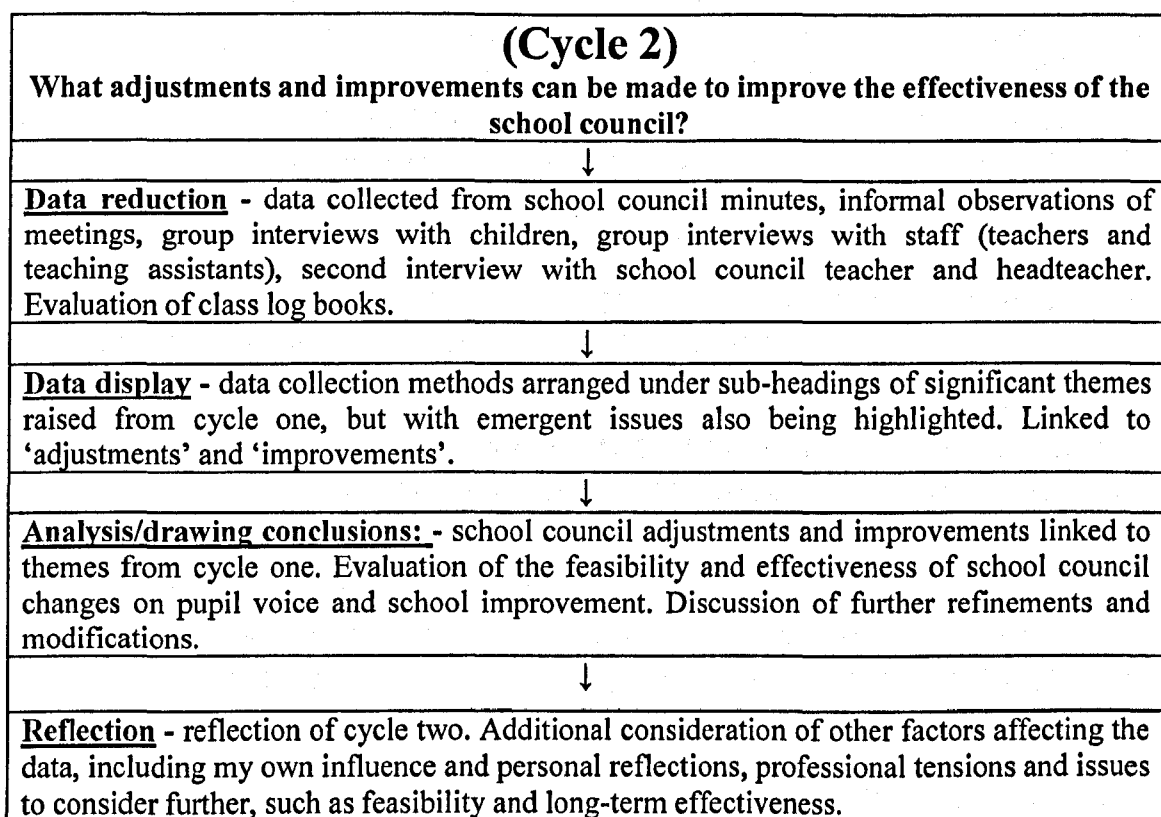


Figure 2.4. Summary of research cycles

During this chapter, I have discussed the research design, methodology and data collection methods, along with ethical considerations, participant details and methods of data analysis. Despite the research intentions, I was also aware that throughout the study reported here, there may be school issues which result in changes to particular aspects of the research process, or indeed the direction. However, I was very aware of the school challenges and therefore hoped to capture and embrace these, as they highlighted the complexities faced by practitioners. The following chapter presents and analyses data from this thesis.

Chapter Three

Presentation and analysis of findings

Chapter Three

This chapter presents the results and analysis of all data from this thesis. The pilot study evaluates a children-as-researchers initiative and how this facilitates pupil voice, active citizenship and school improvement. Cycle one focuses on the school council systems and practices, providing an in-depth evaluation of their impact upon pupil voice and concluding with suggested methods of adjustment and improvement. The second cycle evaluates the efficacy, feasibility and impact of school council modifications. In support of the action research approach to this thesis, a reflective section is provided after each cycle, subsequently informing the next phase of study. The cycles are presented in chronological order and systematically explore the research questions through a range of data sources.

3.1. Data from the pilot study

Can the concept of children-as-researchers help to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement?

The pilot study focused on what could be learned about pupil voice and school improvement, through enabling children to undertake their own research about issues they identified as important. Six children were selected to participate in research skills training, leading to them conducting their own research. A weekly session was agreed with the headteacher, parents and children, in which two hours were made available for research skills training, alongside the identification of a suitable classroom and resources. All children attended 12 research skills sessions over the school term. A further ten sessions were made available for children to plan, conduct and analyse their own research, with the support of an adult. Three sets of data were analysed from the pilot study and are presented in the following order:

1. Children's research
2. Participant observations – from field notes
3. Reflective journal

Children's research

Children appeared competent and confident in their abilities to conduct empirical research, particularly after the research training sessions. The six children (working in three pairs) independently selected the following areas for investigation. The statements below each research title were also given by the children:

1. **Why do Year 8 children receive more merits than Year 5s?** (Group A)

"We chose this area because we noticed from looking at the merit charts that Year 5 got 1500 more merits than Year 8, so we wanted to know why".

2. **Do boys receive more pocket money than girls?** (Group B)

"We decided to look at pocket money because we saw something on the news that said men get paid more than women and we wondered whether this was the same at school with pocket money".

3. **Are Year 6s being bullied and what factors affect this?** (Group C)

"We chose the topic 'bullying' because we think that bullying is a serious concern and we want to know more about if Year 6s are being bullied".

It was evident that following appropriate training and adult-support, children were able to select a research focus which was pertinent to them. The rationale for children's research interests does not need to be questioned or adjusted through adult filters. On the contrary, activities that nurture inquiring minds should be supported and encouraged. At the conclusion of the children's research initiatives, each group produced an electronic presentation (Power-point slides), summarising their studies. An example of a child research presentation can be found at Appendix B. Direct quotes from Power-point slides provide further insight into children's understanding of the research process:

Group A: *we were chosen at random out of all children in our class. We felt happy that we missed other lessons because we were still learning. Mr Avieson had to ask our parents if we were allowed to take part in his research. Our parents said it was ok to do it.*

Group B: it is important not to lie about your research and be kind to the people you are using in your research. It is important to have evidence to help you answer the questions in your research.

Group C: he [Mr Avieson] explained how not to lie, be kind to people that we use in and not to do anything that they didn't want to do.

These statements provide evidence that children were aware of the ethical issues of their involvement in research, but also the ethical implications of researching others. Children valued the opportunity given to them and were mindful of the thoughts and feelings of their peers. This supported the notion that following specific training, children possessed the appropriate skills and insight to fulfil their role – as researchers. There were many other instances of children considering the sensitivity of their research through child-focused lenses. One significant example involved group C. The young researchers independently requested a map of the school to be included within their questionnaire and later encouraged other children to indicate (colouring) key places where bullying took place. The children collated the data and provided a colour-coded map of results.

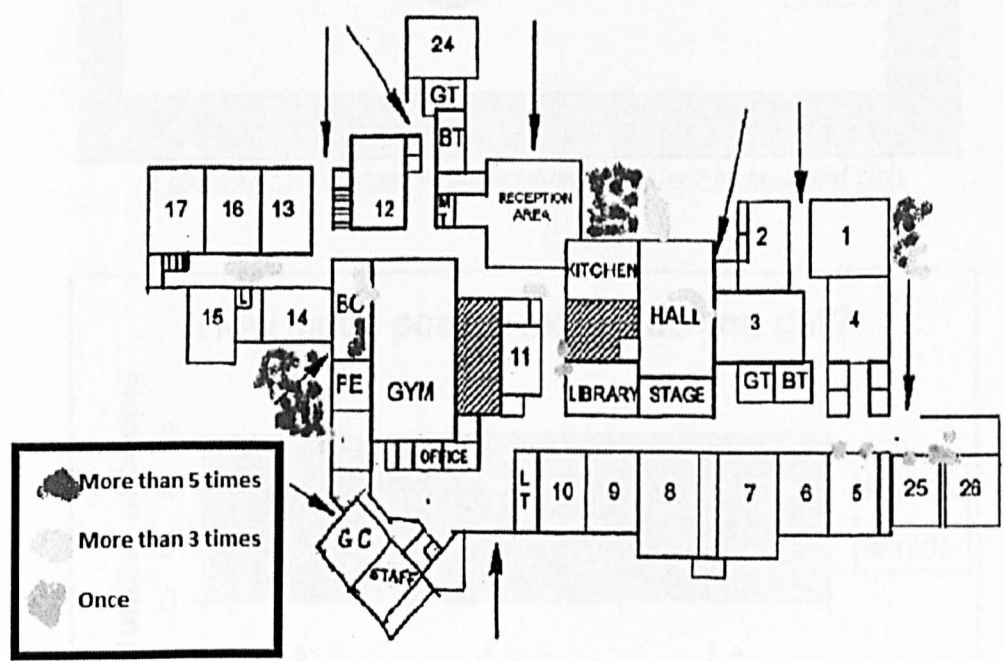


Figure 3.1 Map of school and bullying hot-spots

The results (Figure 3.1) provided evidence that outside areas were hot-spots for bullying, particularly near to toilets. When reviewing the children’s questionnaire, it was noted that

almost all children completed the diagram, but only half stated they had seen or witnessed bullying in school. Through an approach that had been previously overlooked by adults, the children provided a child ‘insider’ perspective on a serious issue (bullying) that affects many schools. This process supported pupil voice and if acted-upon, would lead to school improvement. Furthermore, children seemed particularly motivated by this finding and were very eager to share their success with peers. This also highlights the importance of consulting children on their views of important school issues.

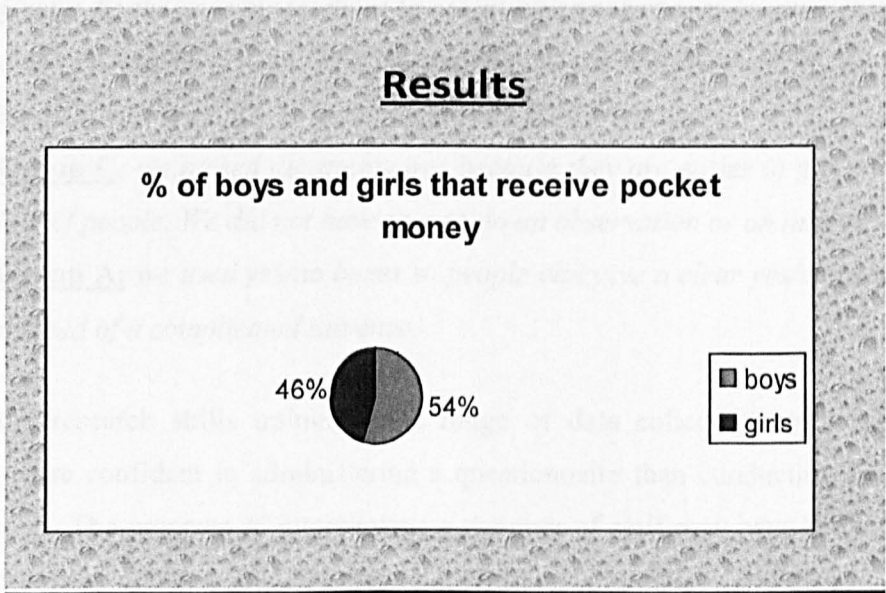


Figure 3.2: percentage of pocket money received by boys and girls

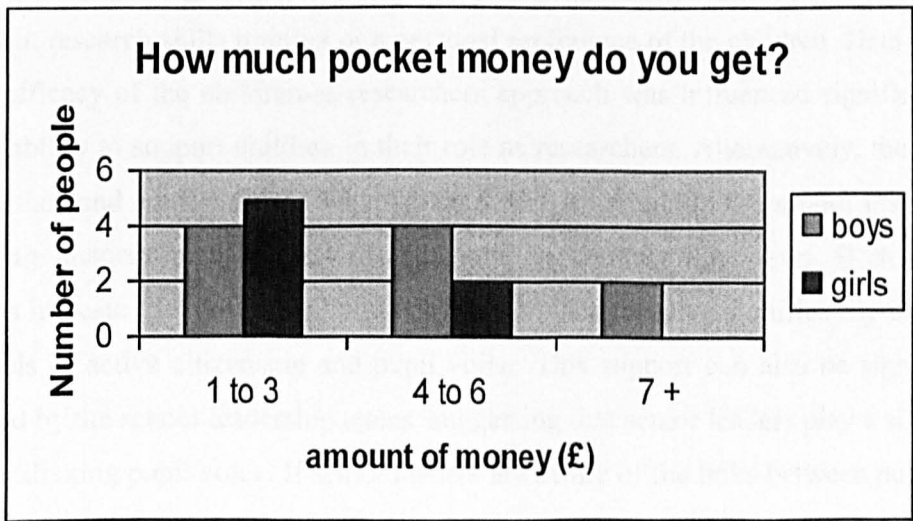


Figure 3.3: How much pocket money do boys and girls receive?

Another group (Group B) utilised Microsoft Excel to present and analyse their questionnaire results. These are depicted in Figures 3.2 and 3.3. The results demonstrate that the children's research was able to produce insightful findings regarding pocket money and gender differences. Selecting a research question therefore seemed a logical step for most children, as it was an area of personal interest or concern. However, the choice of data collection methods seemed a more challenging decision; a point highlighted by all groups:

***Group B:** the reason we chose to use questionnaires was because they're easy and quick to do. But the reason we didn't know if to use the questionnaires or not, because people can lie with answers.*

***Group C:** we picked questionnaires because they are easier to give out to lots of people. We did not have time to do an observation or an interview.*

***Group A:** we used yes/no boxes so people can give a clear yes/no answer instead of a complicated sentence.*

Despite the research skills training on a range of data collection methods, children appeared more confident in administering a questionnaire than conducting an interview with an adult. The prospect of interviewing a member of staff may have been a daunting prospect for many children, highlighting adult-child power relations and their impact upon active citizenship. But it appeared that children also regarded the analysis of questionnaires as being easier. It was difficult to suggest whether this was a result of insufficient research skills training or a personal preference of the children. Data suggests that the efficacy of the children-as-researchers approach was influenced significantly by my own ability to support children in their role as researchers. Alternatively, the existing culture, ethos and adult-child power relations which exist within the school may also be influencing factors upon children choosing not to conduct interviews. Both of these assertions indicate that the type of adult support children receive significantly influences their levels of active citizenship and pupil voice. This support can also be significantly influenced by the school leadership teams, suggesting that senior leaders play a significant part in facilitating pupil voice. If senior leaders are aware of the links between pupil voice and school improvement, then perhaps more institutional practices and policies could be aimed at supporting children as active citizens. For example, the school may have

considered the facilitation of further discussions with staff and children around the children's research areas, such as perceived gender differences across the school. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the 'bullying hot-spots' were identified on the previous school annual pupil questionnaire, demonstrating that children's views can provide a unique perspective on important school issues and, if taken seriously, may lead to school improvement. However, this thesis has already documented many other pressures which schools and educators are faced with on a daily basis.

Data collected suggested that children were intrigued by their findings and there was a desire to research these areas further, perhaps an indication that children had been made more aware of their own voice, through active citizenship and the children-as-researchers process. A disadvantage of this process was that, due to other school pressures, children-as-researchers could not be sustained or continued further within the school and children along with adults had therefore only been given a glimpse of the potential to resolve pertinent school issues. Other limitations of the research process included the length of time required to support children in the research process. The impact upon school improvement may need to be made explicit to school leaders and other school staff, if the process is to be fully supported. However, the children's research proved to be a successful empowerment tool, as children were able to confidently investigate areas of personal interest to them, which also supported school improvement. This process provided a motivational and purposeful vehicle for pupil voice, expressed as a form of active citizenship. To gain further insight, observations of children were also made throughout cycle one.

Participant observations - from field notes

Analysis of field notes and informal observations of children conducting their own research informed this section. A desire to investigate an area of personal interest was evident throughout this study, alongside clear competence in applying research skills training to the research process itself. Children demonstrated that adult support alongside specific skills and training were both necessary to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement. Working in pairs allowed the strengths and weaknesses of each group to be balanced for example during the production of graphs and children regularly took

responsibility for a specific area. This collaborative learning seemed popular and beneficial to pupils, as they seemed to alternate lead roles at different phases of the research. Children became engaged in the research process as active citizens. Overall, the length of time children were given to conduct their own research was not sufficient. Additional time may have led to increased rationale for their choice of methodology, variety of data collection methods and further consolidation of research skills. The data analysis phase appeared rushed and children required more support with this than anticipated. This was balanced against other school commitments such as timetable challenges and looming Standard Attainment Tests (SATs).

Adult-child power relations were highlighted during the research skills sessions and I adopted a less assertive approach during the research sessions, partly due to there only being six children in the classroom, but also in support of the children's voice and empowerment. However, children in the later weeks of the research training began to ask personal questions such as, do you have a girlfriend? Where do you live? Do you have children? These were not questions which had been previously or typically asked within a classroom setting. It was possible that children were aware of the adjustments in adult-child power relations and particularly, the change from teacher in control to researcher as a facilitator. This suggests that involving children as researchers was an empowering process, which offered a mechanism for adjustments to adult-child power relations. These power changes may result in children feeling more confident to offer authentic perspectives that might lead to school improvement.

A school council meeting and whole-school assembly were utilised to disseminate children's research and many positive comments were received from other pupils, parents and staff. The children requested adult support in preparing for these activities and rehearsed by taking research presentations home to show their parents. The efficacy of the children-as-researchers initiative was a positive experience for a small group of children at this school, with observations and field notes confirming this. My reflective journal also provided insight into the research process.

Reflective journal

The reflective journal was completed at the end of each research skills training session, during lessons where children were conducting their own research and at infrequent moments where other issues became apparent. Following an analysis of the reflective journal I noticed that my comments could be categorised into four distinct but inter-linked themes. The four emerging themes from the reflective journal were: personal reflections and professional development, efficacy of the children-as-researchers initiative, adult-child power relations and pupil voice and school improvement.

Examples from journal	Emerging theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One member of staff confrontational about releasing children for the research.• Staff asking why children are missing lessons.• My own research being reflected in the children.• Delivered INSET to staff and realised importance of making research support teachers.	Personal reflections and professional development
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not enough time to finish data analysis.• Children understood each section on research training, but needed more time to apply this.• Children needed support in summarising their research.• Children produced some really insightful research, but only six involved.	Efficacy of children-as-researchers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children asking personal questions to the researcher. E.g. do you have a girlfriend?• Children attempting to miss specific lessons and teachers to conduct research.• Children working independently and seeking no help from the researcher.• When children were giving out the questionnaires to participants, they asked if I could be present with specific teachers.	Adult-child power relations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children investigated a problem for themselves and reasoned with the results, making some inferences and considerations.• Children presented their results to the school council and assembly.• Children had their views acted upon, e.g. midday staff were asked to patrol bullying hotspots.• Only involved the voice of six children – but they did access the voice of many others.	Pupil voice and school improvement

Figure 3.4: Extracts and emerging themes from reflective journal

The comments demonstrate evidence of a complex and unique context where many other factors were influencing my dual role as teacher and researcher. During further analysis of the reflective journal, it became evident that some comments could be inserted into two or more themes and this was partly due to personal interpretation. For example, efficacy of the children-as-researchers initiative and personal reflections were both closely connected and could have been interchanged between sections. Many of the reflections highlighted potential barriers to the children-as-researchers approach and although these were personal views, they demonstrated the complexity of introducing new initiatives into schools, particularly when the link with school improvement was not explicit.

Summary and next steps

My reflective journal supported evidence from children's research, informal observations and field notes, particularly highlighting time constraints and adjustments in adult-child power relations. The overall efficacy of the children-as-researchers initiative was further documented, but the challenges of delivering such an initiative with the unique pressures of a school environment were highlighted. The emphasis on providing appropriate training, time and space for children to conduct their research was identified as critically important, but this was balanced against the pragmatic constraints and perceived links to school improvement. Following adult support and appropriate training, pupil voice and active citizenship were exemplified during cycle one. Despite over 24 weeks of training and support, only six children gained valuable experiences from the research process. The concerns raised by these individual children were pertinent, but it would be difficult to use this intervention to the benefit of all children in a school. It was therefore imperative that the study reported here considered alternative methods of facilitating pupil voice and school improvement during cycle one, which could be easily implemented, maintained and involved the collective views of all children. My own reflections were also influential on the pilot study and the proposed direction of cycle one. These were subsequently considered in further detail.

Reflection

The pilot study highlighted the link between my personal, professional and research experiences, with each being influenced by the other. Firstly, my personal journal demonstrated a lack of confidence during the initial stages of this study, as I was continually concerned with how I was perceived by other teachers and the feasibility of my research questions. I hoped to justify the allocated time, resources and support I had been given, but this placed additional pressures on trying to make my research work and subsequently, on some of my interactions with children. Occasionally, I lost focus on how pupil voice would inform school improvement and was therefore of benefit to schools and staff. Despite these personal reservations, I was given the full support of the headteacher throughout the study reported here and I was mindful not to underestimate the importance of support from senior staff. Throughout the pilot study, I became increasingly aware that headteachers played a significant role in facilitating pupil voice and active citizenship. The efficacy of children-as-researchers and school councils would therefore be reliant on support and flexibility from headteachers and senior staff. My own flexibility was also highlighted with this cycle. As a head of year, I was frequently involved with disciplining children across the school and was perceived by some staff and children as 'firm, but fair'. Shifting my own style and approach during research training sessions was therefore a challenge, as this adjusted my own professional identity. My reflections throughout the pilot study, coupled with my personal research interests into children's voice, confirmed my desire to work within education, but I was also reminded of my core values and beliefs.

Overall, the children-as-researchers initiative was a partial success, but further consideration of including more children, effective use of time and adult support were required. Adult-child power relations and how they influence the efficacy of children's voice was highlighted, but it was important that any approach to facilitating children's voice had longevity and became a natural part of children's school experiences. It was possible that independent research could be the next logical step for children, as this may provide further evidence of 'child-initiated' empowerment and active citizenship. But guidance and support from adults would still be required. The children-as-researchers may therefore be more beneficial if, after the necessary training, children were able to conduct

several research projects during their time at school. From my own experiences within this cycle, I was very aware of the unlikely feasibility of this and how it would be challenged by other school pressures. As a result, consideration was given to how the principles of active citizenship, children's voice and empowerment could be facilitated through existing systems and mechanisms within schools, as opposed to a timely intervention. My personal observations of school councils in three different schools highlighted the tokenistic nature of children's voice in some settings and I became aware of existing parallels between children-as-researchers and school councils. Both are aimed at facilitating empowerment, children's voice and active citizenship. School councils offered a formal mechanism in which pupil voice was regularly facilitated and consideration of improving the efficacy of such a system was feasible. This could even be a natural part of the school evaluation process. Furthermore, it was envisaged that children could be given the necessary skills to not only operate as effective school councillors, but also research school issues in more depth, thus leading to empowerment, active citizenship and school improvement. Further exploration of this assertion was evidently required within cycles one and two.

The pilot study identified the challenges of being a researcher and teacher in the same educational setting and with conflicting aims. The academic literature and principles of children-as-researchers were influential but constrained by the pragmatic challenges of the school. This cycle highlighted a personal shift into considering an improved system of pupil voice, as opposed to what I may have previously regarded as a 'perfect system'. Although it was difficult to make explicit what I perceived to be a 'perfect system', my experiences throughout the pilot study had suggested that even small improvements to pupil voice mechanisms would make an impact and were more likely to be sustained. Equally, my role as a teacher continually reminded me of timetable constraints and a requirement to focus on purposeful pupil voice leading to school improvement, as opposed to pupil voice for the sake of consulting children. These factors partially supported my decision to focus in more depth on school councils. Almost all schools across England have an existing school council and modifications and improvements to an existing mechanism for pupil voice and school improvement may be more positively received than any perceived intervention.

Between the pilot study and action research cycles one and two, I changed schools to take up a position as assistant headteacher in an inner-London primary school. As a consequence, I had to make some adaptations to my research design to include this second school. I needed to find my feet and re-negotiate the purpose and aspirations of my research with a new school management board. Fortunately School B was equally interested in my exploration of pupil voice and school improvement but less so in the role that children-as-researchers might contribute to this. I therefore used the knowledge I had gained about pupil voice from my pilot study to inform the remainder of the research with a closer focus on the school council as a potential vehicle to deliver more effective pupil voice and school improvement.

3.2. Data from cycle one

How effective is the current school council in facilitating pupil voice and school improvement?

The aim of this cycle was to evaluate the effectiveness of the school council in facilitating pupil voice and school improvement. In light of the findings from cycle one, research in school B also focused on long-term sustainability, training and skills for children, power relations and pupil voice influencing school improvement. It was therefore important from the outset that a clear representation of the school council was formed, based on evidence from a range of sources. Six sets of data were subsequently analysed in cycle one and are presented in the following sequential order:

1. School council minutes
2. Observation of school council meetings
3. Interview with school council teacher
4. Group interviews with children (school council and non-school council)
5. Group interviews with staff (teachers and teaching assistants)
6. Interview with headteacher

School council meetings were conducted on a weekly basis (30 minutes each) in an unused classroom. Two children (one boy and one girl) represented each class (from Year two to Year six) totalling in 20 children, with a designated teacher who was responsible for organising and supervising the school council. One of the Year six children had been nominated as chair person and using an agenda set by the headteacher, would lead the meeting each week.

School council minutes

During the academic year 2010-2011, a total of 24 school council meetings took place and minutes were recorded (handwritten) on standard template. This section is informed through the analysis of school council minutes over one academic year. The initial analysis revealed that four specific prompts were used during all school council meetings: What's

going well? What can we improve? Cause of problem? Solution and who? Each of these areas was explored in further depth.

What’s going well?

The first question raised by the chair person (Year six boy) was ‘what’s going well?’ Children were initially invited to give their positive thoughts from the week, with responses being recorded. Further analysis of school council minutes suggested that children’s responses could be grouped into one of seven emergent themes. These are depicted below in Figure 3.5, alongside the frequency.

What’s going well?	Playground equipment	Children happy and making friends	Kitchen and food	Day trips	Cleanliness of the toilets	Children enjoy lessons	Children doing their work and behaving
Frequency	18	22	14	12	6	8	9

Figure 3.5. Comments given by school council and frequency

A majority (68%) of children’s comments, related to playtimes and lunchtimes. The importance of equipment, friendships and toilets was also evident. Only two of the seven themes (19%) involved lesson/curriculum time, although positive comments regarding day trips to the local area were frequent. Many comments were repeated at later meetings. For example, ‘children are happy’ and ‘children enjoy lessons’ featured throughout numerous meetings and were frequently given without specific examples and therefore required further investigation. The data initially appeared positive, but could have been indicative of children giving positive statements which they felt the school council teacher wanted to hear. There was also a noticeable link between ‘what’s going well’ and the second section on the school council document: ‘what can we improve?’

What can we improve?

Following further analysis, the frequency of children’s comments were recorded and responses were grouped into six themes. These are shown in Figure 3.6

What can we improve?	Playground equipment	Children not making friends	Children misbehaving at playtime/lunchtime	Kitchen/cutlery cleanliness and quality of food	Dirty toilets	Assembly music
Frequency	23	12	12	17	6	5

Figure 3.6.Frequency and comments given by school council

Of particular significance, 100% of children’s comments related to playtime and lunchtime issues. 47% of suggestions related to playground equipment and children not making friends. The data were slightly contradictory, as 94% of issues highlighted by children as ‘areas to improve’ were also previously identified as strengths (‘what’s going well?’). For example, it was reported that children were playing with each other and making lots of friends, but in the same meeting, children raised concerns about friendships. One explanation for these contradictory statements was that these were personal experiences of school council members, as opposed to the collective views of their classes. This of course raises issues around the inclusion of all children’s voices. Alternatively, this suggested children were not actively engaged in meetings and therefore unaware of earlier positive comments.

Once again, it was evident that children did not discuss important issues, such as teaching, learning, curriculum and lessons. It was difficult to suggest whether children were happy with these areas and they did not warrant further investigation, or if children required further support in discussing these areas. However, these data provided some evidence of tokenistic pupil voice and further school improvements were likely, if children were consulted on teaching and learning issues. The final two sections of the school council documents related to the ‘cause of problem’ and ‘solution’.

Cause of problem and solution

This section was not completed for any of the 24 school council meetings analysed. The ‘what can we improve’ section frequently included descriptions of what was occurring and was not outcome-focused. It partly described the cause of the problem. This was illustrated in the notes taken during a school council meeting in December 2010 – Figure 3.7.

What can we improve?	Cause of problem	Solution	Who
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People aren't making friends (KS2) • Boy's toilet water is dirty. • People throw cutlery and people step on it. • Floor in the gym is dirty. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playground friends should play with them. • Talk to headteacher. • Tell your classmates. • Tell SENCO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone • School council

Figure 3.7. Minutes taken from a school council meeting in December 2010.

The term 'people' was used regularly during school council meetings, as it was observed that children were not allowed to name adults or children in the school. The solution for resolving any issues involved school council members approaching specific members of staff and reporting back at the following school council meeting. During the pilot study, the adult-child power relations had been highlighted by children and were evidently influential in facilitating pupil voice. This was a significant area to consider further in cycle one, in particular the impact of interactions between school council members and teachers. As well as analysing school council minutes, a number of observations were also carried out.

Observations of school council meetings

Three informal observations of the school council were conducted during each of the academic terms of 2010 – 2011. Each child started the meeting in possession of notes from the previous session, recorded in an individual school council book. Children had typically carried out actions since the previous meeting, although it was observed that children frequently reported on 'action' rather than 'what's going well', at the beginning of the each meeting. For example, one Year four child reported that after speaking to the premises manager, the sink in the boys' toilets was being fixed in the next few days. The school council template utilised by children had no specific section for feedback or action and may have therefore caused some of the contradictory statements identified in the analysis of school council minutes.

Similar to cycle one, timings were frequently an issue as meetings started at 1pm and were scheduled to last for thirty minutes. After lunchtime, my own experiences suggested it took several minutes to settle the children. In addition, the first part of the school council meeting focused on waiting for silence, books to be placed on the desks and for the teacher to ascertain what was going well. Highlighting positive school actions was an integral part of the school council process but this, combined with the limited time, left less time for discussion of other child-initiated issues. During one meeting, approximately 18 minutes were left to the content of the school council meeting.

The observations provided evidence that the school council teacher played a significant role in managing the timings and suggestions within school council meetings. For example, children were frequently asked to put their hands down towards the end of every meeting, as there was no time left. Although the chair person asked the questions, he was frequently prompted by the teacher. When children started to talk over each other or became distracted, the teacher would also intervene. However, the teacher also reminded the children that the session was positive and aimed at improving the school and therefore attempted to discourage individual issues and complaints, although it was difficult to separate these from class concerns. This may have suggested that the children required more support in their role as school councillor. Younger children (Year two and three) spent the majority of time taking notes in their individual school council books, as their own notes were used to feed back information to their classes. Several children would write as quickly as possible and one consequence of this was that some children did not give their views during the meeting. Two specific children did not raise any issues or concerns during all three meetings observed. Note-taking appeared to be a barrier for some children, reducing their ability to engage in the meeting and give their own views. Children did not appear aware of their specific roles as school councillors and the significance of their contribution. In addition, a nominated secretary (Year five pupil) was the official note-taker and these minutes were given to all teachers within the school, but it later transpired that copies were not given to teaching assistants or children. This suggested the dissemination of school council information was an area for further investigation, alongside power relations, and was later discussed during interviews with staff at the school.

Summary of school council meetings

In total, 24 school meetings took place during the academic year of 2010-2011 and children raised seven key issues: behaviour of children, equipment, toilets, kitchen, day-trips, assemblies and friendships. Meetings were repetitive in nature, as children reported many of the same positive issues as areas to improve. This was partly due to the agenda template and children highlighting individual incidents, rather than the collective views of their class. This raised further questions regarding how information from school council meetings was gathered and whether these were the views of individuals or the collective views of the class. The 'cause of problem' was an area not considered during school council meetings, partly due to the agenda format. There were no discussions of curriculum, learning and teaching and almost all comments related specifically to play-time and lunch-time activities. This suggested school councillors were not fully aware of their role or able to gather the views of all children in their class, but this also required additional support from adults. Meetings were formal and organised, with a Year six pupil relaying a set agenda (prompts) to the other children. This agenda had been designed by the school headteacher. The school council teacher provided background guidance and support with behaviour management and timings. Some children struggled with taking notes during the meeting and time constraints made it difficult for all children to share their opinions. The dissemination of school council minutes did not include teaching assistants, but further clarity on this issue was required. Equally, the mechanisms for children being elected as school council members had not yet been explored. Prior to gathering the views of children and staff on the above areas, it was important to explore the issues raised in more depth to ensure that the emerging representation of the school council was accurate. It was envisaged that additional insight could be provided by the school council teacher during an individual interview.

Interview with school council teacher

The school council teacher (Teacher A) had worked at school A for three years and had been responsible for school council during the previous two years. Themes from the school council minutes and observations were used as topics for discussion with Teacher A, alongside other pertinent and organisational issues. To provide a systematic and logical

sequence of events, the initial discussions focused on the mechanisms for children being voted into the school council.

***Interviewer:** how are children selected to become school council members?*

***Teacher A:** obviously, during the establishment curriculum week [first week of the autumn term], children are picked. Teachers give them some information first about going to meetings and representing their class. Some children think it is all about trips, but it is not! During that time they write a speech about why they would make a good school councillor. We relate it to local politics about how the mayor is voted. They select two from each class, normally a boy and a girl. Even previous councillors can be voted again.*

***Interviewer:** the children that are finally voted for, how do you get their two names from the rest of the class?*

***Teacher A:** we say who would like to be a school councillor and usually lots of children do. Then only those that want to prepare a speech about why they should be voted. All children get a post-it note and vote in secret. The adult then counts the votes.*

It was significant that children were not pre-selected for the school council by adults, as all children were able to put themselves forward if they wished. Children were required to write and deliver a short speech. Communicating effectively as a school councillor was important, but there was still a danger that less articulate children would not present well during class speeches. The written speech may therefore represent an inclusive barrier to becoming a school councillor and accessing pupil voice. The literature review highlighted how inclusion and standards do not always support each other and as an 'insider', I was acutely aware of the high standards of writing expected in all pupils. It was feasible that these standards of writing were implicitly embedded in many aspects of the school life, including the school council.

The voting system was kept anonymous and further rounds of voting were common if there was a tie. School council guidance given to teachers was in the format of a one-sided

memo and reminded staff that two children should be selected (one from each gender) and to ensure the voting system was fair. There was no explicit discussion of the key characteristics required by school councillors or the requirements to discuss important issues. Following analysis of the school council minutes, it was observed that children did not discuss important issues, such as: curriculum, teaching, lessons and learning. These observations were highlighted during the interview:

***Interviewer:** I noticed that there was lots of discussion about behaviour, friendships, kitchen, toilets and trips. But little regarding the curriculum and learning?*

***Teacher A:** children sometimes take it a bit personal and I am always reminding them that it is about their class views. If I asked them about the curriculum, they would probably give me their personal thoughts into it. So someone who hates reading will say let's do no reading. It's a way of gathering the collective thoughts of the class and not being personal. I think it could be better than it has been, but I have to think about time too.*

This supports earlier observations regarding children reporting on individual experiences, as opposed to the collective views of the class. Teacher 'A' was very clear about what children should be doing and how their views should represent their respective classes. It appeared that questions around curriculum, learning and teaching were avoided to reduce the personal comments, although the disadvantage of this was that the voice of all children was not being facilitated, listened to, or acted upon. The impact of pupil voice within the school council may therefore be minimal and focused heavily on less pertinent issues. The study reported here supports the notion that playground, toilet and equipment issues are important issues to children, as these perceptions are the perceived views of children. However, with additional adult support and school councillor training on their rights, roles and responsibilities, pupil voice could be further enhanced and may subsequently influence school improvement.

The voice of all children was important and the methods of gathering and disseminating information were therefore critical within this study. In school council meetings, children suggested that they gave regular feedback to their classes. But did this happen effectively?

***Interviewer:** what about giving feedback to classes? Does this happen?*

***Teacher A:** yes, I mean, I tell the children. They do forget and they do not carry around their school council books all week. I suppose the main thing to be better is for children to think of what was discussed and not just talk about personal concerns, or the same ideas again and again.*

***Teacher A:** I can't think that teachers could allocate a specific session for school council because the timetable is so full. Even me as the class teacher, sometimes I say let's do the feedback another time like on Monday. Maybe teachers can remind children to speak to school councillors more. Some probably do this well, but I don't know.*

Similar to cycle one, additional timetable pressures were influencing the efficacy of pupil voice and inclusion of all children. The vast majority of children in the school were not members of the school council and therefore powerless in sharing their views and responding to feedback. The 'voice' of all children was not being facilitated and the overall efficacy of the school council may therefore be questioned. Children required support from adults in gathering the views of others and this included appropriate time and the necessary skills to accomplish this. Improved school council systems and procedures may address some of the issues raised, but this would require senior staff acknowledging there were significant areas for development and a willingness to allocate time and resources to facilitate pupil through the school council. It was therefore important to gather further evidence from children and adults regarding the issues raised, as this would add increased leverage during discussions with the headteacher. Children were interviewed before staff, as it was intended that their views would prompt the focus of discussions with teachers and teaching assistants. Furthermore, a thorough evaluation of the school council effectiveness could not be completed without the views of the main stakeholders: children and adults.

Group interviews with children

Interviews with children provided a unique perspective on the effectiveness of the school council, the perceived attributes of a school councillor and insight into children's lived experiences of pupil voice. Four semi-structured group interviews (4 children per group) were conducted with school council and non-school council members and further analysis of interview transcripts highlighted three key themes. Each of the following themes is subsequently discussed in further depth.

1. School council voting system
2. Gathering and disseminating information
3. Focus of school council meetings

School council voting system

Children reported that the voting systems used were fair and effective; but suggested that only well behaved children should be on the school council. Below is an extract from one of the interviews:

Interviewer: *who can tell me how you get picked for school council?*

Pupil B: *if people notice in your class that your being like responsible, then they are going to pick you.*

Pupil D: *they put it in a box and then see who school councillor, with most votes.*

Pupil A: *you must be good at talking. I am.*

Interviewer: *what about if you are not very good at reading or writing?*

Pupil A: *no. you could be, but it's about your potential like. You know if you're not good at maths and stuff like that, it's about the way you behave.*

Pupil E: *well, I didn't exactly be a school councillor from the first day. Because our old school councillor got fired because they got lots of 'level four' letters. The teacher asked if anybody else wanted to take his place, it had to be a boy. I put my hand up because I thought I would be great.*

Children portrayed a positive perception of how school councillors were elected. Pupil E highlighted how poor pupil behaviour would result in having the school councillor role taken away. This highlighted the high expectations of school councillor behaviour, but also the potential barriers to pupil voice for these children. Perhaps the school had not considered mechanisms that supported pupil voice for children who could not behave in meetings. The right to voice is an entitlement, but within schools, it appears this can be perceived as a privilege. In addition to behaviour, children suggested that respect, communication and confidence were other important characteristics:

Pupil J: yes, you don't have to be good at things, just be good at respecting children and your communication.

Pupil I: behaviour too. Say like you're reading a book and you get stuck on and you can't read it, you can still be a good school councillor.

Interviewer: so it is more about behaviour and respect?

Pupil L: it's about confidence really; you just have to be confident and good.

It appeared that being confident, well behaved and communicating effectively, were key attributes for school councillors. These characteristics may have presented a barrier to shy, inarticulate children and those with learning difficulties or challenging behaviour. This highlights the inclusive nature of pupil voice and how children may be excluded if their behaviour is judged inappropriate by an adult. Many national and school policies focus on an inclusive approach towards provision, ensuring that all children, irrespective of their age and ability, can access the curriculum. But the notion of inclusive pupil voice may be perceived as a reward by some practitioners. Further clarification of the children's interpretation of communication was required, as this was an important factor in gathering and disseminating information from their peers.

Gathering and disseminating information

Children reported that feeding back information to their class after school council meetings would often take place, but time would be rather limited:

Interviewer: *what about giving feedback to your classes?*

Pupil B: *we always come on Fridays at one o'clock after lunch and we talk about things, and go back to our classes and then we read it, say it to them.*

Pupil C: *sometimes we do and sometimes the teacher says wait until next week.*

Pupil B: *you get your book and then two people say what you're not allowed to do, like not throw ball into building site.*

Children agreed that there were occasions when it was not appropriate to give feedback immediately after school council meetings, but this usually happened on another day. Individual school council books were an important tool used by children, as they contained notes from meetings. Children further highlighted concerns over gathering views of their classmates:

Interviewer: *when do you ask the class for their ideas?*

Pupil N: *sometimes at playground, but not in class.*

Pupil M: *yes, sometimes, just before the meeting.*

Pupil N: *we don't do it much but sometimes children tell us things at playtime.*

Interviewer: *but what happens if nobody has talked to you all week?*

Pupil L: *it is your ideas really.*

This was a critical part in the efficacy of the school council, as the views of 20 school council children were not representative of the entire school. The pilot study highlighted that it was important to facilitate a pupil voice mechanism which was inclusive of all children across the school. Children not in the school council were rather forth coming regarding their views on class feedback:

Interviewer: *do the school councillors ask you for ideas for the meetings?*

Pupil K: *they don't really, it's like when they finish telling us about the meeting, they just ask anyone got questions, but sometimes they don't.*

Pupil J: *they don't ask me.*

Pupil K: *they do say what happened and they don't ask you what you want.*

Pupil L: *Sometimes we are doing work and don't have time.*

Children's comments in both interviews corroborated data from other sources and suggested that the methods of giving feedback and gathering children's views were not always effective. Specific skills and qualities were required to facilitate these collective discussions with children, both from staff and children. But similar to children-as-researchers, without the support of senior staff and time available in the school timetable, this was unlikely to happen. Time constraints in gathering the views of all children appeared to be an emerging theme:

Pupil A: *yes, but we don't have time, because it's play time and then quick, straight from play after we get our books, but nobody is in there.*

Pupil D: *yes, me and [pupil x] don't really ask many questions because a lot of children just talk about playground stuff, most of them do and other talk about the other things. That means we don't really do it that much.*

Children in all group interviews agreed that additional time would be beneficial in gathering the views of others, but appropriately highlighted how it would not be possible immediately before the school council meeting, as it was lunchtime. Timetable constraints also made it difficult to ensure a specific slot was allocated by all teachers, as music, PE and other school events had to be considered. Timings to gather and disseminate information were highlighted throughout, as this impacted upon the school council effectiveness and the voice of all children. Time constraints during school council meetings would not only exclude specific children, but would also influence the range of issues.

Focus of school council meetings

Children were informed that after reviewing the school council minutes, there was little evidence regarding discussion of curriculum, learning and teaching issues. Children reported that there was not always enough time within meetings:

Pupil C: *yes, we can't just say what we like about lessons, it is about other children and we are not allowed to use names of teachers or children.*

Interviewer: *so why do you not talk about lessons?*

Pupil B: *sometimes children want to say about it, and we finish the good things early and people still have things to say, but we don't get the chance.*

Pupil A: *[school council teacher] gives us a list of things we talk about but does not give us enough time to talk. She says put your hands down.*

Pupil C: *we don't have time to talk about everything.*

Children's insight into the importance of gathering a collective view showed some awareness of democracy and the role of school councillors. Children also attributed the lack of discussion around teaching and learning to the time constraints of the school council meeting and the fixed agenda.

Pupil C: *well we have an agenda that the chair reads out and go through them until she [school council teacher] says stop.*

Interviewer: *what does the agenda include and could anything be changed or added to it?*

Pupil B: *some things could. It has what's been going well and we say what we did, like talking to Shahana [headteacher] about something. We have to go back to lessons though, or we miss maths. I am good at maths.*

Although timing issues were identified, it was clear that similar to children-as-researchers, school council meetings could not continue for an indefinite period, particularly with a busy school curriculum. Agenda changes were important, but would be ineffective without sufficient time and space provided for children.

Summary of children's interviews

Children reported positively on the voting system used to elect school councillors and considered the key attributes as being confident, respectful and behaving well. Children struggled to identify their specific roles and purposes as school councillors, suggesting that

further training and support were required. All children were vocal in their frustrations that collective views were not always gathered by school council members, due to insufficient time. Timing and agenda issues were highlighted during the school council meetings, with children often unable to give their views or discuss curriculum issues. The interviews demonstrated that children were very honest and aware of the key areas to improve, but not able to take action without adult support and intervention. The data also corroborated earlier findings from school council minutes, observations and the interview with the school council teacher. Children had considerable insight into the main school council issues and areas to improve. At this stage, it was important that classroom teachers and teaching assistants were consulted on their perceptions of the school council. After all, the feasibility of any changes would be most suitably judged by staff that were aware of the day-to-day challenges.

Group interviews with staff

Two semi-structured group interviews (5 adults per group) were conducted with staff from the school. One involved teachers and the second group involved teaching assistants. Separating the two groups of staff was a logistical and pragmatic choice, due to the availability of staff. This issue was later raised during an interview with teaching assistants. A summary of the interviews and staff responses is depicted in Figure 3.8. Three sub-themes were identified and each of these was explored in more depth.

Issues highlighted by staff	Statements from teaching (T) and support staff (TA)	Emerging sub-themes
School council voting system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes about popularity. (TA) • Children voted are often more articulate. (TA) • Speaking and listening highlighted as pre-requisites. (TA & T) • Older children are accustomed to voting process. (T) • Younger children find it more challenging. (T) 	Barriers to becoming a school councillor
Gathering and sharing information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier with older children. (T) • Disrupts other lessons. (T) • Unable to give feedback and gather class views. (T & TA) • Should be more important. (T) • Happens on occasion. (TA) • Children need support or prompts. (T) • Could be more training for children on their role. (T & TA) 	Facilitation of children's views and training for children
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff not sure of the issues children discussed. (TA) • Unaware of what happens in school council meetings. (TA & T) • School council issues should have been picked up before. (T) 	Staff awareness and power relations across school

Figure 3.8. Staff responses during group interviews.

Barriers to becoming a school councillor

The interviews began with a general introduction to the school council and how children became members. Below is an extract taken from one of the interviews with teachers:

Interviewer: *I would like to start by asking you what you know about the school council at this school and how are children selected?*

Teacher A: *well children have to write a speech at the start of the year and then other children decide which boy and a girl they vote for. This year we also had an extra SEN school councillor in my class.*

Teacher B: *well it changes up the school. Mine are Year 5s and have had years of training at the school and they know to think for themselves. So, the two children picked from mine are not the most popular, I can think of*

who they are. They are not unpopular. One was chosen because she was really caring and considerate and only came last year. The other one is very loud, but he is smiley and sometimes felt on the outside. So I don't think it's a popularity contest, not in my class.

Teacher C: I think it was in my class! Because they are Year two, I sort of said who wants to go for it and only two children did not want to go for it. I explained what would be their job and then they voted for a girl confidentially. But it was the two most popular children.

How children were voted for was becoming clear, but the teachers raised further considerations of age differences. It appeared that there could have been additional support systems for younger children, particularly in relation to electing members fairly. The skills or characteristics of school council members had only previously been discussed as pre-requisites or existing skills, but two teachers commented on how being involved in the school council also had benefits:

Teacher C: it is interesting because in the beginning I thought it was to develop the two school council members, but as the year has gone on, it has been more about ensuring the whole class have a say and feed back into meetings.

The comments demonstrate that teachers were aware of allowing children's voice through the school council. It was positive that some staff were utilising the school council process as a vehicle for improving confidence, but this also demonstrated that there were some inconsistencies regarding the role of school councillors. These individual differences amongst staff were mirrored amongst children and may have led to a difference in prioritising timetable pressures and feedback. The purpose and role of the school councillor were not clearly defined throughout the school and although some of the responsibility for this may have rested with the school council teacher, it was also heavily influenced by the headteacher and senior staff. This influence may have included a consistent and clear message to all staff on the purposes of the school council, their specific role in school improvement and how staff can support children. The evidence suggested that the influence of senior staff significantly impacted upon pupil voice and the school council effectiveness.

Supporting the views of children and timing issues were also raised by adults during group interviews.

Facilitation of children's views and training for children

Other teachers highlighted timetable constraints as a particular issue preventing children from giving feedback:

***Teacher A:** yes, I find it really frustrating because we used to teach numeracy on a Friday afternoon, so they would come back half-way through, like quarter to two and they would want to talk in the middle of numeracy. There was a rush to finish that and then half of my class are missing some of the numeracy work and I didn't feel we were given enough importance to it.*

Both interviews discussed the likelihood of having a specific slot for feedback or gathering of information, but it was agreed by all staff that this was not feasible, due to the different timetables across each year group. Staff suggested that even if time was made available, children would require support and training if they were expected to gather the views of their classmates and discuss curriculum, teaching and learning issues.

***Interviewer:** what do you mean by training for children?*

***Teacher E:** they do need time in lessons firstly, but they can't do much about that. That's teachers. But if they knew how to listen to everyone in their class, like they need to know that not everybody will agree, but if the majority do, then that would be a start.*

***Teacher F:** some probably think they have been selected because they will represent their class anyway, because they are well behaved, or whatever. They do not always know what they are supposed to do.*

***Teacher E:** I suppose things like, what their role is, what they have to do, why they should and also things like what they can comment on and how to do it sensitively. You don't want them whingeing about specific teachers.*

The training implications were important in conjunction with the additional time constraints. All of the data so far had suggested that children were competent and willing to give their views, but a limitation was their knowledge and skills in the specific roles of the school councillor and their ability to gather the collective views of their peers, without additional adult support. Similar to cycle one, it would be reasonable to accept that children must be provided with the necessary skills to carry out their role effectively. Teaching staff were familiar with many of the issues raised within the interviews, partly as a result of reading school council minutes on a weekly basis. In contrast, teaching assistants suggested that they knew little about the school council meetings as information was not always passed to them.

Staff awareness and power relations across school

It was ascertained prior to the interview with teaching assistants that they did not receive copies of the school council minutes in their 'pigeon holes'. This was described by the school council teacher as an oversight on the school's part, but something the teaching assistants felt strongly about:

Adult B: to be honest, we also don't see what they actually do in the school council, so we cannot always support children either. I can't remember the last time I saw the minutes or was informed about the content of one of the meetings. It is very difficult for me to say, which is a shame.

Adult D: same here and I have worked here forever.

There were simple modifications to the dissemination of minutes which could have been addressed to ensure that all staff received minutes from school council meetings. But this required a whole-school and strategic approach to pupil voice. There was a clear difference emerging in the dissemination of school council minutes to different audiences. For example, teachers received photocopied minutes on formal paper, individual school councillors recorded their own notes, all non-school council children received a verbal recount from school councillors and teaching assistants received none of these. During this phase of the study, I considered whether formal mechanisms of pupil voice within school

can act as a micro-representation of the voice of all adults and children within a school. There were clear power struggles existing within the school and these were mirrored in children and teaching assistants. Control of this power was in the hands of teachers and senior leaders. Interestingly, the teaching assistants asked if they could raise other issues with me, following the interview and tape recording. It transpired that they did not feel they had a voice within the school and appeared grateful that a member of senior staff was taking an interest. This issue is addressed further in my reflections of cycle one.

The interviews with staff also added depth and context to many of the issues raised in the pilot study and cycle one, such as appropriate time, training requirements, involvement of all children and the importance of adult support. These emergent themes provided a platform to consider feasible and suitable improvements to the school council. However, it was critical that findings from cycle one were discussed with the headteacher, as the influence of senior staff on pupil voice had been made apparent throughout the study reported here. For transparency purposes, data from cycle one were emailed (in summary) to the headteacher, two weeks ahead of the scheduled meeting.

Interview with the headteacher

Following receipt of cycle one data, the headteacher requested a brief meeting to ascertain the purposes of the interview. It was explained that the interview was aimed at gathering the headteacher's view of the school council, thoughts on data collected from cycle one and possible areas for improvement. The interview commenced and after introductory discussions, the headteacher was asked about the purposes of the school council.

Interviewer: *let's just start with your overall thoughts of the school council, any strengths or areas you would like to see improved and anything else? In your eyes, what are the purposes of the school council?*

Headteacher: *it is about giving them a voice; I think the school council is a concept our children are becoming used to. Our local community view the school as authority and a fixed organisation, but they are getting used to it. Some children are more forthcoming than others with their ideas and views.*

Interviewer: *are children aware of their rights and are they aware they can voice their concerns over educational matters?*

Headteacher: *probably less aware of their rights than some other children, but they are generally happy to give their views. I see the school council minutes each week and they are very honest! Our annual questionnaire has always been completed very honestly by children and I have been amazed how issues that I am aware of are also highlighted by children in their questionnaire.*

Interviewer: *such as?*

Headteacher: *they recently complained about music assembly and teachers playing boring songs for them. I had reports from teachers that children were playing up in assembly and in one of my walks; I saw a really dull assembly.*

Children may have perceived the school as authoritative, but the comments suggested that children were confident to give their views when this was facilitated and supported by adults. The annual pupil questionnaire administered by the headteacher suggested that children were honest about their experiences, when asked specific questions. Children occasionally raised concerns in a more informal manner. For example in summer 2011, children complained directly to the headteacher about the pressure of SATs and how teachers made them feel worse, because they looked 'stressed all the time!' This may have been a select few older children (Year 6 – aged 11 years), but both examples provide evidence that children responded honestly when given an opportunity, but this needed to be facilitated by adults and may not have been an approach adopted by less articulate children.. The mechanisms for all children giving their views (e.g. school council) were perhaps less effective. This raised questions regarding children's suggestions in school council meetings and their impact on school improvement.

Interviewer: *can you give me examples of suggestions that children have made and any evidence of impact?*

Headteacher: *playground suggestions for the new design all came from the children. For safety they were changed a little, but they gave lots of good ideas and we used them. Also, each class gets a budget of £20.*

Interviewer: *are there any other suggestions that children have made?*

Headteacher: *probably, but I can't think of any right now.*

Interviewer: *how do you see the school council currently? Is it effective?*

Headteacher: *in terms of moving it on, I would want them involved a lot more in school issues, like: recruitment, leading projects and they have helped to re-design the junior playground. In terms of how effective they are in collecting information from their class, feeding back to their class, then I don't know.*

Interviewer: *the communication of class representatives feeding into meetings and back to class is often an area of improvement, are you aware of this?*

Headteacher: *Actually, I did not know until I read through your interview notes, I realised that I must email her and ask her [school council teacher].*

The examples given by the headteacher, supported the data from school council minutes and suggested that children frequently highlighted playground and behaviour issues. The allocation of £20 was a positive example of children being consulted about their playground equipment. These factors raised the issue of ascertaining collective views and if these were not consistently gathered ahead of school council meetings, then it was possible that not all children were consulted on the preferred type of playground equipment. Further analysis revealed that playground equipment and the initiation of a summer talent show were the only two documented suggestions made by children. However, a clear theme emerging at this stage was the headteacher's desire and willingness to improve the school council.

Interviewer: *would you make any changes to the school council?*

Headteacher: *yes, I am not happy with it. I think a lot more proactive and in terms of time, allow them to collect representative views of children in their class and take a lead on curriculum projects and recruitment. But mainly, get them to bring issues to the meeting so we can do something about it.*

Interviewer: *do you think that school council training would support this?*

Headteacher: *yes definitely and we can do this next term.*

Similar to the pilot study and school A, the headteacher was willing to make improvements in the future, but the data raised concerns about why children had not been involved with school council training and discussions of curriculum issues in previous years. Perhaps the headteacher was unaware of the school council issues, or maybe these were not considered a school priority. Either way, it was an important admission from the headteacher as it indicated a positive move forwards. The headteacher's support provided an optimistic platform for further modifications to the school council.

Summary of cycle one and next steps

The data from this research cycle focused on the school council effectiveness in facilitating pupil voice and school improvement. It was envisaged that exploration of school council issues would highlight strengths and possible areas to improve. Supporting data from the pilot study and cycle one, it was important that any suggestions for improving the facilitation of pupil voice were meaningful, pragmatic and sustainable. It was therefore important to build upon the initial findings and ensure that I weave the emergent themes into adjustments and improvements, which could be easily integrated into the existing school council systems. Figure 3.9 subsequently represents a summary of cycle one and the proposed method of addressing each issue in cycle two:

Issues raised in cycle one	Proposed adjustment and improvement	Intervention theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children repeating previous 'actions' as areas 'going well'. Insufficient discussions of teaching and learning in meetings. • Children having more autonomy in school council meetings. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agenda format changed to include 'action' since the last meeting, 'what's going well?' and 'areas to improve'. 2. Further prompts from the school council teacher and agenda on teaching and learning. 	Organisation of school council meetings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering the collective views from all children and timetable constraints. • Taking notes during meetings and the challenges for some children. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Class school council log book to replace individual books - used to gather and disseminate views and issues throughout the week. 4. Notes are only recorded by one school councillor from each class. 	Facilitating the views of all children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring children are aware of their role as school councillors. • Supporting children to feed back school council information to classes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Specific training on the roles of school councillors. 6. Specific training for school council members on gathering, disseminating information. 	Training for children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff unaware of the aims and purposes of the school council. • Ensuring all staff are able to support pupil voice and school council processes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. INSET on the school council and its role within the school – all staff. 8. Copies of school council minutes given to all staff (including teaching assistants). 	Support from senior staff

Figure 3.9. Summary of cycle one and proposed changes.

Prior to implementing the proposed adjustments to the school council, it was imperative that I also considered my own reflections on cycle one and how I may have influenced the systematic analysis of data and the proposed direction of cycle two.

Reflection

From the outset, I perceived a school council which was not as effective as it could be and children seemed grateful for 'any voice' within the school environment, but were entitled to much more. This made me consider my own personal and professional agenda and how it may be in contrast to the views of colleagues. This supported my professional relationships with colleagues at an early stage and was paramount in the remaining cycles of my research. Throughout this cycle, I became more aware of the sensitive nature of my school research. I was subtly questioning the school council, voice and its effectiveness at the school. This situation was further complicated by my own power relations with children and staff. I was responsible for the performance management of the school council teacher and it therefore placed me in a difficult position, as I did not want her to feel threatened or challenged by my own research. I initially perceived my research within the school as very separate from my role as an assistant headteacher. But as time progressed, I became more aware that adults and children perceived my research as part of my role and my position within the school. I became increasingly mindful that staff and children may say what they thought to be appropriate, rather than what was actually happening. To partially address this, I acknowledged that collecting data from a range of sources and presenting this data to staff and children, rather than my interpretation of the data, would be a more useful approach. I also became more aware of my own influence when analysing transcripts and pondering why I did not ask alternative questions. This made me continually reflect on what other issues were influencing the data. For example, the repetitive nature of school council meetings was initially attributed to the fixed agenda, but I later considered the lack of training for children, time constraints and ages and abilities of children. Remaining transparent and honest throughout the research process, alongside keeping the headteacher and other staff informed of my progress were two significant factors I became mindful of. My own sense of injustice for the children was carefully balanced between the contextual situation and my senior role within school. This awareness encouraged me to remain critical, open and exploratory in my research approach and to carefully consider the

feelings of others. I became increasingly aware that there were subtle improvements which could make a significant impact upon many children's experiences of childhood.

Interviewing the headteacher was daunting from my own perspective, but reflecting on the interview transcript, it appeared that the headteacher was a little embarrassed that areas for improvement were being highlighted. This was not anticipated, but it reinforced the sensitive, but contrasting nature of interviewing adults and children. For example, during children's interviews it was a challenge to prompt children to speak about key issues relevant to the school council, but not put words in their mouths. Conversely, some of the adults interviewed wanted to say much more and required less prompting. The most revealing interview involved the teaching assistants, as the conversation highlighted concerns over their interactions with teachers and how they felt mistreated. An additional extract from this interview is attached at Appendix C. It was encouraging that the teaching assistants felt they had a voice during the interview and were able to disclose their personal opinions and thoughts. Many of the teaching assistants' concerns were also disclosed after the recording has stopped, but the teaching assistants further requested that I not divulge the information to other staff in the school. This made me consider confidentiality issues around the interviews, as my role as assistant headteacher was to support the school in improving. However, I disclosed all information to the headteacher to ensure there were no repercussions, but highlighted the sensitivity involved. Remaining reflective about relationships, research, professional practice and gathering suitable data were the real challenges of this cycle. My dual role as researcher and practitioner had become more entangled than previously expected and considered in a more complex manner, particularly balancing personal research interests with professional responsibilities.

This cycle highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of approaching data collection with themes or issues in mind. These offered a necessary focus for interviews, but also had the danger of clouding judgements and not being open to new issues. One specific example involved figure 3.8 and the sub-theme 'facilitating the views of all children and training for children'. This subtheme emerged from group interviews with staff and the two areas within this theme were presented as interlinked issues. Although this may have been the case, further analysis of additional data suggested that 'training for children' was a key component in facilitating pupil voice and this later became a theme in itself. Considerable

time was taken to ascertain the other themes in Figure 3.9, as I wanted to ensure that these had emerged from the data. For example, I reflected considerably on 'support from senior staff' and whether this theme was based upon my own frustrations with the school council. This was initially termed 'senior staff involvement', but this 'involvement' did not seem enough to signify proactive behaviours which influence pupil voice. Similar to children requiring support from adults, it appeared that adults working within the school also required assistance from senior staff. The full support of the headteacher was an important catalyst in the third research cycle trajectory and making appropriate changes to the school council. This support gave me increased confidence as a practitioner, but also as a researcher within a school setting. It also reinforced my original concerns for the children and levels of pupil voice within the school. However, I was aware of the power that this support gave me within the school context and I therefore attempted to remain exploratory, cautious and inquisitive throughout cycle two.

3.3. Data from cycle two

What adjustments and improvements can be made to improve the effectiveness of the school council?

Cycle two was focused on implementing and evaluating the proposed modifications to the school council. It was important that these issues were examined through a wider lens, incorporating literature on children's rights, adult-child power relations, pupil voice and active citizenship. But from a practitioner's perspective, it was equally important that these interventions were feasible, sustainable and effective. It was anticipated that the proposals would not only influence the school council, but would promote a democratic culture across the entire school.

The eight interventions from cycle one were discussed with the headteacher and school council teacher. These were subsequently implemented into the next available academic year (2011 – 2012) and were communicated with all staff, via a whole-school staff meeting. During this meeting, data from cycle one were presented to staff and further discussion of the role of school councillors was facilitated. Support from the headteacher was emphasised to all staff and the four emergent themes from cycle one were discussed in additional depth. At the point of data collection, the interventions had been in place for one academic term (thirteen school weeks). A range of data sets was analysed to review the effectiveness of the school council interventions: School council minutes and class log books; interview with the school council teacher; three group interviews with school council members; interview with the headteacher; and informal observations. The order of data analysis was based on inductive methods (Creswell, 1998) and sequential time-frames. To demonstrate the inter-relatedness and complexity of the proposed interventions outlined in cycle one, data were presented and analysed under the following headings:

- Organisation of school council meetings
- Facilitating the views of all children
- Training for children
- Support from senior staff

Organisation of school council meetings

In order to facilitate children’s views within school council meetings, two new items were added to the school council agenda: ‘action since the last meeting’ and ‘teaching and learning’. An evaluation of agenda changes was informed through analysis of school council meetings, log books, interviews with children and school council teacher. Agenda changes were made prior to the first school council meeting of the academic year. The impact of both agenda changes were analysed in more depth.

Action since the last meeting

Each meeting began with a review of action since the previous meeting and involved children reporting their actions to the school council teacher. Overall, these statements included actions that individual and small groups of children had taken. Some examples of comments taken from school council minutes are given below:

- “Water fountains have been replaced”.
- “Sharon [teaching assistant] cannot swap play-time slots”.
- “KS1 children are now putting their equipment in bags”.
- “Children in Need was successful last week”.
- “There will be a hand-towel in KS1 toilets from now on”.
- “Playground friends are available if you need someone to talk to”.

There were two occasions where ‘no action’ was reported and one of these was the first school council meeting and the second was a school council meeting which was used to discuss playground rules as a result of a newly refurbished playground being made available to all children. School council minutes frequently listed two to three actions per week. A summary of all ‘action’ is depicted in Figure 3.10 below.

Action since last meeting?	Playground equipment	Kitchen and toilet improvements	Other children behaving	Positive events (trips, etc.)	Teaching and learning
Frequency	6	5	3	5	5

Figure 3.10: frequency of school council comments regarding previous action.

Playground equipment, toilets and behaviour of children were important issues for the school council, but it was also evident that there were improvements in the frequency of curriculum discussions. All teaching and learning comments are given below:

- “Year five Science would be more fun from now on”.
- “Tim [ICT teacher] is going to change ICT plans”.
- “Rachel [RE coordinator] will check lesson plans to make it less boring”.
- “Guided reading has to be twice a day”.
- “There has to be extra numeracy lessons before SATS”.

Each of the five statements referred to a decision which had been taken by the appropriate teacher or adult. All comments involved children making a personal request or clarification of a particular curriculum area. These were positive statements and an improvement on cycle one, but also demonstrated that the teachers’ responses were final and not challenged any further. For example, there was no clarification from teachers of what made ‘RE boring’ and how these issues would specifically be addressed. Children reported positively to the school council each week, irrespective of the decision made by teachers. These points were discussed with the school council teacher.

***Interviewer:** when children go away and discuss an issue with a teacher, like children have said the lessons are boring. How do staff respond?*

***Teacher A:** well children are very polite for a start, so they don’t say it like that. They will say ‘oh in numeracy some children feel that they have been on the same unit for a long time’. Then the teacher might say OK, we will come back to this unit in a few weeks.*

***Interviewer:** are children and you happy with the responses?*

***Teacher A:** yes, because at the end of the day, they have to teach and have lots of other things to consider. Where they can change something they normally will, but everyone is under pressure with assessments at the moment.*

The teacher highlighted the other school pressures that may influence teachers’ responses. Informal observations of school council meetings confirmed that children would typically

report back on who they had spoken to and the outcome of any conversation. Children and the school council teacher did not discuss the issues any further and it was generally accepted that the teacher would have done all they could to rectify the issue. Furthermore, the agenda changes had meant that 'action since the last meeting' was considered as the closure of previous meeting issues and therefore discussed quickly, prior to the start of a new meeting. It was anticipated that such changes to the organisation of the school council meeting would also lead to more time being spent on important issues, such as teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning

'Teaching and learning' was incorporated into the school council agenda, under the headings: 'What's going well' and 'areas to improve'. A summary of school council comments during thirteen meetings is given below in Figure 3.11. Although several comments were not regarded as curriculum issues, it was positive that children were supported in giving their views on different aspects of teaching and learning. The vast majority of comments related to enjoyment of activities and lessons, something which the children regarded as an important factor. Children were also aware of repeated curriculum content and times when they had missed out on lessons.

	Teaching and Learning	
	What's going well?	Areas to improve
Comments from school councillors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ "Year five set are enjoying literacy". ➤ "Gold class are having fun in numeracy". ➤ "Orange class are being sensible on the stairs". ➤ "Year two made jelly in science". ➤ "KS1 enjoyed literacy" ➤ "Hazel [Year six teacher] is funny". ➤ "Year three enjoying ICT". ➤ "Year five enjoy making pots". ➤ "Everyone likes the curriculum". ➤ "KS2 like mental maths". ➤ "Year one and two enjoyed having a coach for PE". ➤ "Year four enjoyed big writing". ➤ "Year six enjoyed science because they made PowerPoints about dinosaurs". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not fair that teachers are allowed fizzy drinks. • Year four are doing the same things in all numeracy lessons. • Year five have missed art. • Science has become boring in Year five. • Year six want more play time. • Some children being horrible to reception children. • ICT is the same as the year before. • Year six doing the same science lessons again. • Year two need to improve their handwriting. • Some children forgetting their homework books. • Not all computers are working and some children cannot use them. • Children need to improve their attendance. • KS2 equipment has gone missing.

Figure 3.11: Comments from school councillors on teaching and learning.

Data from Figure 3.11 were also supported by the views of the school council teacher.

Interviewer: *two of the changes to the agenda included the addition of teaching and learning and a separate section for children to report action from the last meeting. How has this gone?*

Teacher A: *good, the children are definitely talking about the curriculum more and asking lessons to be better. They reported on different things each week, but enjoyed being able to make comments.*

Interviewer: *OK – and for teaching and learning issues, are children more likely to comment on lessons?*

Teacher A: *yes, they say if it was repeated, like if they did the same ICT lesson the year before. From a teacher's point of view, it's nice to hear them saying things they enjoy and don't like in classes. The children in school council always say good things, but now they say that some units they have been learning about for the last three weeks are boring. They still talk about other things outside of the curriculum like ice skating, trips and Children in Need.*

The teacher recognised that there had been improvements in the frequency of discussions around teaching and learning and it was reported that children exhibited a desire to discuss curriculum issues. Interviews with children further supported this view and suggested an increased confidence in approaching adults within the school community.

Interviewer: *I have been looking at your school council notes and I noticed that you talk about teaching and learning in school council meetings.*

Pupil E: *well we say what we want to improve and what is going on in lessons. Like what we can improve more. I like ICT though.*

Interviewer: *what sort of things do you discuss?*

Pupil E: *are lessons interesting? What do we like? Anything really.*

Pupil F: *and then we talk to the teacher about it.*

Pupil E: *well we tell them and then they see what they can do.*

Although children were vague on the specific teaching and learning issues they discussed, it was apparent that children discussed more curriculum issues than in previous years. An emerging theme was significance of actions from teachers who were approached by school councillors with pertinent issues. The 'influence' of children's suggestions was a critical factor in reducing tokenistic voice. It was also important to clarify the range and depth of

the issues raised by children. Further analysis of school council minutes identified seven distinct areas and these are shown in Figure 3.12.

Teaching and learning comments	Enjoyment of lessons	Boring/less interesting lessons	Positive comments about a teacher	Lessons had been repeated in previous years	Concerns over missed lessons	Concerns about resources for teaching and learning	Non - teaching and learning comments
Frequency	19	8	9	4	6	6	6

Figure 3.12: Emerging themes from teaching and learning comments.

The data suggested that there were an almost equal amount of positive and negative comments regarding teaching and learning. Although some statements appeared contradictory, it was evident that children were making judgements on individual moments and lessons. For example, in one meeting children reported that Year five science was fun, but the week after suggested the teacher was boring. This raised two important issues. Firstly, perhaps children had an expectation that teachers and lessons should be fun, all of the time. Secondly, none of the comments made by children referred to progress and attainment, perhaps of significant importance to many teachers. Although adults within the school environment may have decided upon the balance of learning and enjoyment, the data suggested that enjoyment was an important factor for many children and the school council was not always able to influence this balance. Children were subsequently asked to clarify the important components of a lesson.

Interviewer: *what else is important in lessons, apart from fun and enjoyment?*

Pupil E: *well it should not be too hard or easy. Sometimes maths is easy.*

Pupil C: *we should be learning and know how to get better because we might want to change something or make it better. Like my sister is in Year one and she needs to improve her handwriting.*

Pupil B: *lessons should be fun and we should learn. But I am glad that we get asked about lessons because we might have some ideas to make it better, like using one laptop each and not sharing one.*

Children demonstrated insight into their rights to be consulted on schooling issues. E.g. several children stated they were all unhappy with missing the same lessons during each school council meeting and suggested that the classroom teacher moves lessons around to ensure they are not disadvantaged. Children appeared confident in making suggestions on how to improve lessons, but were vague when probed a little further. The data suggested that enjoyment and challenge were two important factors for children. Once children made suggestions in meetings regarding teaching and learning, they took action to try and achieve these.

Summary of agenda changes

Overall, there were improvements in the frequency of discussions around teaching and learning. Comments given by children demonstrated a 'surface level' evaluation of teaching and learning, rather than a consideration of more in-depth issues, such as timetabling, subject content and themes within the curriculum. Nevertheless, children were confident to approach teachers regarding curriculum issues. They accepted or did not challenge teachers' responses, even if the decisions were not favourable. It was not envisaged that children would debate teaching and learning issues at length with teachers, but there was no evidence to demonstrate that children's views or challenges to adult decisions were facilitated any further. Consideration of other pressures faced by classroom teachers were highlighted as important and must therefore be considered in evaluating the efficacy of school council improvements. Although additional 'space' was given during school council meetings, it was evident that there were limitations to the improvements that this would bring, particularly considering the complex nature of school councils. For example, it was not clear if the teaching and learning issues raised by children were collective issues from a particular class, or those of individual school councillors. Consideration of how children gather and disseminate information subsequently came to the forefront of this study.

Facilitating the views of all children

Following the suggested interventions, each class was given a school council log book to record class issues throughout the week and which also acted as a prompting document

during school council meetings. Log books were issued during the second school council meeting and each book was shared between the two school councillors from the class. It was used to record information from meetings and disseminate back to classes. There were two fundamental differences with the revised class log book and previous school council books – firstly, information was gathered and recorded throughout the week as a way of recording all issues and this acted as a prompting document in meetings. Secondly, this was a whole-class log book and both school council members were therefore not required to take notes, allowing at least one pupil from each class to engage fully during meetings. During cycle the pilot study, it was observed that children conducting research in pairs appeared to complement each other's strengths and weaknesses, providing an empowering form of active citizenship. It was envisaged that a similar sharing of responsibilities with log books would support children learning from each other. It was also intended to prompt adults within the classroom to record appropriate information, rather than relying on the memories of particular children. Following analysis of over sixty pages of log books and in contrast to the school council meetings, only three comments related to teaching and learning were discovered and all were contained within a Year three log book. These were:

- “I enjoyed ICT, art and golden time”.
- “I enjoyed numeracy because every lesson I have is always easy”.
- “I enjoyed ICT because we used PowerPoint”.

Almost all comments in the school council log books referred to playground and behavioural concerns, suggesting that these were the main issues still being considered by most children in the school. The log books suggested that teaching and learning issues were not discussed in most classes and subsequently, the majority of children did not express their views of teaching and learning. However, children reported that they were more effective at gathering the views of their peers as a result of the log books. The analysis provided evidence that dissemination of information from school council meetings back to children in their classes was happening regularly. Evidence from school council minutes and log books had suggested that discussions of teaching and learning were not always effective and children had frequently given their personal views during meetings. These views were valid in their own right, but the majority of children may not have their own voice heard. These concerns were discussed with children.

Interviewer: *how do you get ideas from other children when you go back to class? How do you make sure the ideas are not just yours?*

Pupil C: *we ask, like every Friday we ask them and put it in the school council book. We talk about everything.*

Pupil B: *in the school council book, we write what we need to improve.*

Interviewer: *do you talk about teaching and learning in your classes?*

Pupil C: *we do, but everyone always talks about other stuff, like equipment, not seeing their brothers and toilets being small.*

The comments may have suggested that school councillors attempted to discuss teaching and learning issues but faced considerable challenges, as other children raised issues over behaviour and equipment. Secondly, no other children identified examples of teaching and learning discussions in the classroom, but stated that they frequently took place. This may have suggested that information was not effectively recorded in log books. In contrast, the school council teacher suggested that log books were effective at gathering and disseminating information.

Interviewer: *what about the new log books? Have they helped?*

Teacher A: *yes, I think that this was probably one of the greatest changes that I would say, rather than having two books, they have just one and it is used to ask for ideas. Giving all children access to that book has been really useful, whereas before, all children were writing in the meetings and probably not listening properly.*

Interviewer: *are all children in classes accessing the class books, not just the school councillors?*

Teacher A: *more than before. I can tell in meetings which classes have been discussing the issues from last week and some school councillors go around their classes after giving feedback and say, is there anything you would like us to mention next week. The children then write their ideas and they always say the books are being used.*

The teacher reported the log book intervention as positive, both in school council meetings and classes. Children recorded information more effectively within meetings, as only one

child was taking notes and gathering information from their class mates. These views were supported by school councillors.

***Interviewer:** how do you decide who takes notes in the log book during school council meetings?*

***Pupil A:** we can choose who.*

***Pupil B:** we take it in turns, one week one person and then we swap. One person can listen and one can write notes.*

***Interviewer:** do you think it is better than both writing?*

***Pupil C:** yes, there is no point you both doing the same writing every week. I like to do the writing most, but we still take it in turns and then I can listen to what everyone says.*

It was not anticipated that children would prefer to take notes in meetings and this led to occasional disputes over who would write in the school council log book; although these were often resolved without adult interventions. During an informal observation of one meeting, Year four children agreed to write for 15 minutes each, rather than taking it in turns each meeting. Children may have considered this note-taking as one of their key roles within the school council and this may indicate that they were not fully secure in their understanding of the school councillor role.

Summary of facilitating the views of all children

It appeared that individual log books improved engagement in school council meetings, as only one child was required to take notes. Children and the school council teacher agreed with this, but these changes were not without challenges. Children suggested that the log books were effective at gathering the views of their peers, as they occurred throughout the week. Analysis of log books and school council minutes revealed that discussions of teaching and learning were less frequent. Children raised personal and not collective issues regarding teaching and learning, as these were evidenced on school council minutes, but not in log books. This suggested that there were limitations in the effectiveness of the log books. Therefore, not all children in the school were given an opportunity to express a view and the facilitation of children's voice was still being heavily influenced by adults.

Log books were not sufficient alone, in encouraging class discussions of curriculum issues. This required additional support, through adult support and additional training for children on their roles as school councillors.

Training for children

Initially I considered devising and delivering school council training myself, but I resisted this urge for three reasons. Firstly, I was mindful of not wanting to undermine the school council teacher, indeed this could be an empowering opportunity for her. Secondly, it would have taken considerable time to design and produce resources for children and finally, there were resources publicly available to support schools with school councils. After considerable research into this area, school council guidance booklets were purchased at the start of the year from 'School Council UK'. This resource was selected as it included images, cartoons and worksheets to explain the roles and purposes of the school council. These were designed specifically for primary aged children. Initial meetings with the school council teacher included discussions of how to deliver the training. The first two school council meetings of the term were devoted to school council training and an additional lesson of 60 minutes. Furthermore, the first ten minutes of every school council meeting after this were allocated as training time. In total, children received four hours of school council training with the school council teacher and completed approximately three hours of independent work – completing cartoons, images, word-searches and quizzes.

Children were enthusiastic and positive about school council training. Almost all interviewees explained that training time was at the start of every meeting and exhibited a degree of confidence in their role as school councillor. One child had been on the school council in previous years, so offered additional insight into the changes.

Interviewer: *what is it like being a school councillor?*

Pupil E: *well last year I did not become a proper school councillor because I did not get voted. My teacher suddenly picked me because he [another pupil] got fired for being naughty. So I got picked by the teacher but not elected.*

Interviewer: *do you feel better now you have been voted in properly?*

Pupil E: *Yes because they would say if they did not want me to be a school councillor.*

Interviewer: *are there some changes on the school council this year?*

Pupil E: *well last year we didn't get the training books or have any training. We just got called in. This year we had so much training that it took a couple of weeks before we had a proper meeting. Then we got used to the training.*

Pupil 'E' acknowledged that the training for school councillors had been useful and an improvement on previous years. These comments suggested that children were willing to embrace the training and children were observed carrying their training manuals around the school and showing them to other children and staff. Although it was important that children enjoyed this process, it was equally important that there was a positive impact for school councillors, other children and school improvement. The school council teacher reported positively on the training for children and its influence on improving the overall effectiveness of the school council.

Interviewer: *we made several changes to the school council at the start of the year. Before we discuss them in more depth, how has it been overall?*

Teacher A: *I think it has been good and definitely positive. The children have enjoyed the training and it has been useful for me to see the training also. They like the books and have worked through the main sections.*

Interviewer: *has the training helped them to be more confident and assertive in their role?*

Teacher A: *yes, they do seem more confident in what they need to do. It has helped me to understand what they need to be doing too.*

The interview suggested that the teacher had developed her own knowledge of the school council, which was a positive move forwards. These comments emphasised the requirement for school council training for children and adults. Further clarity was obtained on what children had learnt from the training.

Interviewer: *what do you do in the training and how has it helped?*

Pupil F: *it trained us about what the jobs do, like chair and secretary and how to be a better school councillor. In this book, it tells us what the problems are and when we need to talk to somebody, it makes us better.*

Pupil H: *and what we do in meetings.*

Pupil E: *it reminds us that we have to listen to what our classes say and be responsible, not just say our own things.*

Pupil F: *and it is about curriculum and playground things, making it better and safer and what's going on around the school.*

Children were previously aware of the two key positions within school council meetings: chair and secretary, but they demonstrated additional insight into their role in solving problems and representing the collective views of their class. The interviews suggested that children had positively embraced the changes and modifications to the school council, but still required support from adults within the school. An unforeseen issue was that extra training for children reduced the overall amount of time they had to discuss other issues in their school council meetings. These concerns were raised by the school council teacher, two weeks into the term and the overall length of school council meetings was subsequently increased by fifteen minutes to a total of forty-five minutes. It was fortunate that I was in a position to make this request direct to the headteacher.

Interviewer: *has the training and extra time made an impact?*

Teacher A: *we are having the extra fifteen minutes so that helps and I don't worry about rushing back to my classroom. But definitely, it has prepared them. Some of the dialogue they used like 'during the school council meeting we discussed...' and 'we would like you to...'*

Interviewer: *what else?*

Teacher A: *before OFSTED came in, I quizzed them about their role as a school councillor. It was really nice of them to say they were the voice of the class and represented their class, here to make a difference and improve the school.*

The teacher was positive regarding the training, its impact and the children's views and perceptions of their role within the school council. Children also appeared to be utilising

specific school council terminology. The teacher reported that the additional time, combined with the training and curriculum prompts, had all contributed to improvements into the effectiveness of the school council. Considering the teacher had been working with the school council for over three years, these perceptions of improvement were encouraging. Extra time for meetings and finance to purchase the training books were both approved by the headteacher, emphasising the necessity for senior staff support. The headteacher was interviewed on the impact the school council training made upon the school.

***Interviewer:** it seems that the training books and extra time for school councillors has made a positive impact on the school council. Children can talk about their roles and purposes clearly. They can contribute more in school council meetings and have started to talk about teaching and learning issues more. The training for children has helped, and I remember discussing whether we should buy the training books with you.*

***Headteacher:** to be honest, we should have done the training when I first got here [5 years earlier]. I am sure that I gave her [school council teacher] some information from my last school. I am a bit annoyed she hasn't used it.*

***Interviewer:** the main thing is that things are now improving. What about the extra time for meetings, because I know you had to consider other things?*

***Headteacher:** yes, but at the end of the day, if that's what they need then fair enough. We arranged cover for the teacher. It's just making sure they [children] do not miss too much of their lessons, but that is down to teachers to rotate subjects on a Friday afternoon.*

The headteacher seemed frustrated that improvements to the school council had not been made earlier. However, without the support of the headteacher, the training books and extra time may have not been facilitated. This highlighted once again, how school councils may benefit from adult support, alongside strategic monitoring and development.

Summary of training for children

Children had only completed thirteen weeks of training. However, informal observations and interviews with children highlighted an increased confidence and awareness of their role as school councillors. Children were able and willing to improve their overall effectiveness. The school council teacher supported these assertions and suggested that children had embraced the training and considered their role as critical. Children highlighted the aims of training as improving their overall effectiveness and confidence, subsequently leading to school improvement. Furthermore, the teacher reported an increased awareness of school council issues as a direct result of the training. The training resources and extra time for meetings both required logistical and financial support from the headteacher. This suggested that support from senior staff were contributory factors in improving school council effectiveness. The school council changes were initiated as part of my own EdD research, but careful consideration of the aims and purposes of the school council may provide planning, monitoring and evaluation opportunities. A strong theme which emerged throughout this analysis was the support required from senior staff in facilitating pupil voice mechanisms. This is subsequently discussed in further depth.

Support from senior staff

Analysis of school council minutes, log books and training for children demonstrated that children responded enthusiastically to all of the suggested changes. It appeared that adult support was required to facilitate all of these changes and improve the efficacy of the school council further. Appropriate support for children would only be facilitated by adults, if they had a clear understanding of the school council and its role in supporting children's voice. These issues were partially addressed through staff awareness and were therefore significantly influenced by school leaders. During discussions with the school council teacher, it was suggested that there were many other school commitments to consider.

Interviewer: *do you think staff are aware of the purposes of the school council?*

Teacher A: *we had the INSET at the start of the year that you organised. It was only short, but they are definitely more aware. Yes, they know that it*

looks bad if the books were empty every week and I would know they had not had any discussions with children.

Interviewer: *when I had a look through some log books, they had no discussion of teaching and learning at all. Would some staff just try to fill it with playground or other issues?*

Teacher A: *no, the staff are generally really good and they make sure that children discuss it. Some are better than others but the children tell me if they have not had a meeting or something.*

Interviewer: *would more staff awareness be useful?*

Teacher A: *yes, they can definitely know more and maybe try to explain to them about the meetings and why we have them. Some staff are just annoyed that their children miss lessons each week, but I have said to them, swap the lessons so school councillors do not miss the same ones.*

During the interview, the school council teacher suggested that some staff could improve the quality of time spent on discussing school council issues, but highlighted other teaching commitments faced by colleagues. There was an acknowledgement that staff awareness could be improved and that senior leaders had this responsibility. With increased staff awareness, classroom discussions may have been improved and focused on gathering the collective views of children. This facilitation required further support from school leaders and staff. In support of this, the school council teacher provided evidence that her own professional development and confidence had been addressed through access to some of the training materials.

Interviewer: *have you learnt from the training and this process?*

Teacher A: *I try to follow the guidebook. It has helped me to make sure that what I am doing and saying is right. I try to take a bit more of a back seat in meetings now. Before I used to photocopy the minutes, but after discussing the roles of the secretary, I now let her do it and then she puts copies in the SLT pigeon holes.*

Interviewer: *are you more aware of the school councillors and their impact?*

Teacher A: *yes, I am protective over them, but always listen to what they have to say in meetings and make sure that SLT know also.*

It was encouraging that the school council teacher had dealt with these changes in a positive manner and reflected upon them. The teacher had been in this role for three years and professional development into organising school councils, may have been beneficial at an earlier stage. The agenda changes and organisation of the school council were the responsibility of the school council teacher, but overseen by the headteacher. The final part of the interview with the school council teacher focused on the dissemination of school council minutes to all staff – including teaching assistants. However, it was reported that this intervention had not been implemented, due to other school pressures and time constraints. It was proposed that this would be addressed in the next academic term.

The majority of children's weekly suggestions were made in classrooms, with teachers and support staff present. Therefore, staff awareness of children's voice and its link to school improvement may have been a critical factor in the efficacy of the study reported here. This may have been a consideration for school leaders when strategically planning and evaluating the school council. These assertions were discussed with the headteacher.

Interviewer: *from the log books and discussions with children, it seems that some staff ensure that key issues like teaching and learning were discussed, but other staff did not.*

Headteacher: *I suppose it depends where they have come from and some probably have a more caring and concerned side. They all care, but some of them probably worry about other aspects of their role and are getting used to working here.*

Interviewer: *could senior staff influence this more?*

Headteacher: *yes, but they need to know why it is there and what it is for. The school has other priorities to consider and all staff have to balance what is best for children. I will ensure from now that Sharon [school council teacher] stays on top of it and keeps me updated with how it's going. I might also chair some meetings.*

Interviewer: *OK and would it help at strategic level, if you and the SLT devised a school council policy or guidance to the rest of staff?*

Headteacher: *Yes, but we have lots of other priorities and commitments.*

The headteacher emphasised the opposing challenges of other school commitments. At the time of this interview, OFSTED was expected, the local authority was awaiting assessment data and SAT's results were being forecasted. This highlighted the external pressures faced by schools and similar to cycle one, issues of time and resources. Consideration of this when outlining any school council improvements, but particularly those that may not directly influence school data was important. Most staff were unable to invest considerable time and energy into their understanding of voice and school councils, unless this was prioritised by school leaders. It would be beneficial if a senior leader was involved with the school council as significant improvements may be difficult without this leverage. These assertions were put to the headteacher:

Interviewer: *do you think that a senior member of staff should always oversee the school council.*

Headteacher: *yes, I know a lot of primary schools where the headteacher does it. In one school, they all sit around a table in her office. I don't mind delegating but still like updates on what is going on, especially if you have an inexperienced member of staff running meetings.*

Interviewer: *do you think the staff member should be more experienced?*

Headteacher: *not necessarily. You want someone that will listen to the children's ideas and someone who is willing. Everybody is busy and it is not a role that you advertise. Normally, somebody volunteers. They don't get any extra money for it.*

The headteacher supported the assertion that senior staff need to be involved in some capacity, but also highlighted the voluntary nature of such a role. In some schools, it would be anticipated that a junior member of staff running the school council would not be aware of the external pressures and have little influence on senior staff. In contrast, other schools may have the headteacher running meetings with increased leverage, but senior staff could

be much more aware of the external pressures faced by schools. Both approaches have strengths and weaknesses, but are only likely to be successful if pupil voice and school improvement are explicitly linked.

Summary of cycle two

The agenda changes improved the focus of school council meetings and acted as a prompt for children and the school council teacher. Explicit discussion of teaching and learning had improved, although issues were mostly related to the enjoyment of lessons and individual perceptions alone. These were not supported by the collective views of classes and this was documented through evidence in the school council log books. School council training was reported in a positive manner by children and adults, although further training was required. The length of school council meetings was increased to provide time for regular training. The school council teacher reported increased confidence and awareness of school council issues, following a review of the training for children. One of the eight proposed interventions had not been fully implemented due to other school pressures. Many of the improvements highlighted were due to adult intervention and not the positive actions of the school council or school self-evaluation process. This emphasised the need for adult support in facilitating children's voice within the school community and this adult support was significantly influenced by school leaders.

Cycle two has evaluated a range of adjustments and improvements to the effectiveness of the school council: organisation of school council meetings; facilitating the views of all children; training for children; and support from senior staff. Despite each of these issues being presented and analysed individually, it was evident that these important factors were interlinked within a complex school setting. For example, changes to the agenda format made less impact, as children did not necessarily have the skills and knowledge (training) to make suggestions around the curriculum. Effectively facilitating the views of children relied upon staff being aware of the purposes and aims of the school council. Supporting children and adults in this process required the constant support from the headteacher. However, headteachers and senior staff must also consider a range of other school challenges, such as attainment, progress and attendance data. Unless there is a perceived 'whole-school benefit' to pupil voice and school councils, then less support mechanisms

may exist for adults and subsequently, children. At the outset of the study reported here, it was envisaged that teachers significantly influenced the facilitation of pupil voice. Although the pilot study and both action research cycles have suggested that this was still important, it is increasingly evident that senior staff significantly influenced teachers and the support they received – e.g. space in the weekly timetable to share feedback from meetings. In my role as assistant headteacher, I was part of the senior team, but also a classroom teacher. It was therefore important to reflect upon my own experiences in cycle two and to consider the future trajectory of this study.

Reflection

This cycle evaluated data after the interventions had been in place for thirteen weeks. I considered positive steps in the right direction as a key starting point. This raised the issue of time and consideration of this within action research cycles. For example, the issues from cycle one were fluid, complex and may have altered prior to intervention – nine months later. These subtle shifts may be difficult to identify, particularly as a member of the organisation. Equally, there were fewer benefits in rushing the action research process. However, in light of my experiences of other school interventions, the length of evaluation and implementation of this study seemed appropriate for a primary school.

During cycle two, it was difficult to distinguish between situations where children or staff wanted to give appropriate comments and those where children and staff intended to provoke an action, realising I was concerned with children's voice and evaluating the school council changes. Upon reflection, this was partly because staff and children did not separate my roles as a researcher and practitioner. To some, these roles were simply part of my identity as an assistant headteacher. I naively did not reflect upon this during earlier action research cycles and considered the two roles were not inter-related. However, I increasingly became aware of how my research informed my practice and indeed, how my practice informed my research. Above all else, my increased concerns for children's rights, voice, ethics and adult-child power relations, have all resulted in an increased empathy for all people, particularly those whom I support in schools. My interpersonal skills have developed in line with my research philosophy for fairness and supporting people to meet their potential.

Overall, this cycle made a significant impact upon my own professional development. The complexity of school interventions was made clear, alongside the inter-related factors affecting these. The influence of adult-child power relations became evident during the analysis, but the adult-adult power relations were also highlighted. For example, during an informal discussion with the headteacher, it was made clear that she was not happy with the school council teacher and how the council had been organised. This heightened my awareness of the ethical and sensitive issues of researching my own setting. The interventions had been aimed at improving the experiences for children and not being critical of a specific teacher. Fortunately my position within school provided leverage in persuading the headteacher to take no action. However, this raised the issue of power relations between adults, particularly between the school council teacher and headteacher. I was also mindful of these power relations during my data collection, as teaching assistants were not given school council minutes, even after the proposed changes. After initially being concerned with the voice of children during cycle one, I later reflected upon the voice of adults across the school my own voice within the study. As a result, I attempted to reduce my own voice during the narrative of this final cycle. For example, contrasting the voices of children against the school council minutes and headteacher interviews, was aimed at bringing other voices to the forefront of this cycle. This also influenced my role as an assistant headteacher and, in particular, how it was difficult to consider the voice of children without the voice of adults. I now regarded the two as interlinked, but still considered the prospect of adults mirroring their levels of voice onto children.

Finally, the findings of this research cycle have demonstrated that children required the support of adults and all other interventions rested upon this level of support. School leaders have the responsibility of ensuring staff support children in this process. However, the feasibility of this was not something to be considered lightly. Schools are faced by many challenges and school leaders are often more aware of these challenges, due to the nature of their role. Various demands are placed upon staff and consideration of the best action for children and schools was challenging for headteachers. At one point, I pondered over changing the theme 'support from senior staff' to 'support for senior staff' but tried to keep the focus on children's rights. This cycle brought about an awareness that many schools may struggle to achieve the levels of pupil voice that I would personally like to see. Whilst with hindsight, this was not surprising, but it was still a disappointing prospect.

An acceptance that many schools can make subtle and effective changes to their school councils became a more likely trajectory for this thesis and became the underlying theme for the discussion chapter.

Chapter Four

Discussion

Chapter Four

Analysis of data from the pilot study and two action research cycles has provided significant insight into a range of issues pertinent to the unique educational experiences of children and the facilitation of pupil voice. The purposes of this discussion chapter are to relate the research findings to the academic and theoretical frameworks highlighted within the literature review. It was important that I considered the implications of my findings within the context of other research and national policy. This would emphasise the significant findings from this thesis and provide a suitable platform to ask further research questions within the forward trajectory of this thesis. Four key themes have emerged throughout the action research cycles and each of these is subsequently discussed in further depth.

1. Organisation of school council meetings
2. Facilitating the views of all children
3. Training for children
4. Support from senior staff

4.1. Organisation of school council meetings

School council meetings were regarded as significantly important in drawing together all aspects of children's participation, adult-child power relations and pupil voice. The presence of an adult during school council meetings was reported as a school safeguarding requirement, as opposed to specific concerns over children's competence. Powell and Smith (2009) suggest that children's rights can be influenced by adult perceptions of competence and protection. Hart's (1992) ladder of participation highlights that if adults do not take charge, then the degrees of participation can still be child-initiated and directed. It therefore appears that having an adult present within school council meetings may not itself be an issue for pupil voice, but the levels of adult involvement are influential. Cycle one and two provide evidence that balancing behaviour management with the facilitation of children's voice was a difficult challenge faced by the school council teacher and other classroom teachers. Thornberg (2010) suggested teachers are not necessarily 'to blame' for such interactions, as similar to children, they will be embedded within a cultural, historical,

institutional and social context. However, school leaders are in a position to support teachers in this process. Shier's (2001) participation model indicates that when children share power and responsibility for decision-making, policies and procedures should be in place which support this. A fixed school council policy and approach may not always be appropriate, as schools are evidently fluid organisations and the amount of support a newly formed school council may require at the start of the academic year, may differ from a well-established group of school councillors in a different context. In support of Devine (2004) and Fielding (2004), this thesis suggests that adults have considerable influence and power over children's participation levels within the school council.

Throughout cycle two it became evident that agenda changes positively influenced children's contributions and engagement during school council meetings. A set agenda may therefore be useful during the initial formation and development of a school council, as this provides adult-support and guidance for children. Although Cox and Robinson-Pant (2005) emphasised the ineffective use of 'adult-focused' agendas and their negative impact upon children's decision-making. A set school council agenda may represent what Cummins (2009) referred to as 'institutional' power. Consequently, this thesis suggests that the institutional control of power and what school council children are able to discuss during meetings may be adjusted by school leaders. Holland et al. (2010) suggest that power within schools can be considered as twofold: repressive and productive. Developing an adult-focused school council agenda into a child-focused agenda may represent a shift along a repressive and productive power continuum and most importantly, improve the efficacy of pupil voice. Data from the pilot study demonstrated that after appropriate training children were significantly empowered, when given an opportunity to conduct their own research. I suggest that children within the school council can be equally empowered to write their own school council agenda. Is it unreasonable to expect children to create such a document without adult support and training in the appropriate skills?

The impact of the school council agenda and organisation of meetings also influences pupil voice. In support of this assertion, Cotmore (2004) emphasised the importance of 'time' for school council meetings and how too many adult-focused agenda items may reduce the time involved in gathering children's views on issues which are pertinent to them. This thesis highlights the challenges of facilitating children's views on issues important to them,

but also balancing this with ensuring children have a voice on issues of school significance, which they do not raise without adult intervention and support. Cohen (2005) highlighted how children were rarely involved with important decision-making, but I suggest that this requires adult intervention during the early formation and development of a school council. However, the disadvantage of this is the requirement for additional time. During cycle two, the headteacher allocated an additional fifteen minutes for school council minutes and this suggested that subtle improvements to pupil voice and school improvement were feasible if they were listened to and considered important by the headteacher. However, the overall length of a school council may not be indicative of its effectiveness as this is determined by the conversations which take place. Evaluation of the school council in cycle one identified the high proportion of discussions relating to playtime and lunchtime issues, but with very few related to important issues, such as teaching and learning. Lundy (2007) suggested that adults are obligated to take proactive steps to encourage children to express their views. Children discussed more curriculum issues than in previous years as a result of agenda changes in cycle two. A child-focused school council agenda may therefore be limited without proactive support and guidance from adults. If children are not aware of their entitlement to be consulted on teaching and learning and other important issues, then their rights are not being accessed or facilitated. Throughout cycle one, it appeared that children were not aware of this entitlement and addressing this issue subsequently required pro-active adult-intervention. From my own experiences within schools, this type of adult-intervention is commonly used for behavioural, attendance and attainment issues.

The study reported here, highlights the advantages and disadvantages of school council meetings being led by senior staff. Despite headteachers being aware of the feasibility of suggestions and their role as a significant audience (Lundy, 2007) to support children's voice, they will also be perceived as an authoritative figure by some children and adult-child power relations may consequently influence the suggestions given by children (Whitty and Wisby, 2007). Conversely, another adult acting as the school council leader may have less power within the school to make important decisions, but this reduction in perceived power, may reduce barriers to pupil voice and facilitate honest responses from children. Alderson (2008: 287) suggests that 'children are the primary source of knowledge about their own views' and these honest views during school council meetings may impact

upon school improvement. The individual autonomy of school council leaders should not be underestimated in the facilitation of pupil voice, although it will also be influenced by institutional factors. In support of this, Devine's (2002) model of power, structure and agency, highlights how institutionalised practice may influence how individual adults exercise power within an organisation. It is therefore likely that headteachers are in the most suitable position to significantly influence the adult-child power relations within school council meetings, through their ethos, leadership and establishment of pupil voice policies. I do not suggest that the presence of a headteacher is required in school council meetings. On the contrary, Watts and Youens (2007) suggested that school leadership teams were responsible for supporting pupil voice, but required 'openness, collaboration collegiality and risk taking.'

In addition to the agenda, time and organisation of school council meetings, consideration must also be given to pupil voice mechanisms which sit outside of school council meetings and in particular, how the views of all children are gathered. Children in Scotland and Edinburgh University (2010b) cited the inclusive gap between school council and non-school council members as a 'common weakness', often due to ineffective communication.

4.2. Facilitating the views of all children

Numerous researchers (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Whitty and Wisby, 2007; Yamashita and Davies, 2010) have identified 'inclusion' as one of the major factors influencing school council effectiveness and the study reported here highlighted two distinct strands of pupil voice inclusion; gathering the collective views of all non-school councillors and ensuring that the views of school councillors were disseminated and influential. The former is discussed first.

Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) highlights how 'every child' has the right to have his or her views taken seriously. This study demonstrated that gathering the views of all children was one of the most significant limiting factors of the school council effectiveness. Class log books were partially effective at recording the weekly views of all children, but children suggested that there was not always sufficient time to gather the views of other children, or give feedback to their class. Yamashita and Davies (2010) highlight the importance of gathering the views of all children in the school, but this required frequent

adult support. It was evident that the log books were only effective if fully embraced by adults within the classrooms. Furlong (2010) suggested the attitudes of adults would heavily influence the ways in which children were consulted and how their perceptions were dealt with by adults. Children reported throughout cycles one and two how individual teachers decided upon appropriate times to gather and disseminate information. It is suggested that teachers should maintain this autonomy as they are required to consider a range of complex factors in devising their daily class timetables. However, this study highlights that adults within schools can act as 'gatekeepers' (Powell and Smith, 2009) in supporting the voice of all children and subsequently influencing formal pupil voice mechanisms. Furthermore, there was no evidence of student council members interacting directly with governors and increasing children's audience and influence could be explored further. It is important that children become aware that their voices are being heard by a range of audiences (Lundy, 2007) and that their views are being considered seriously. If teaching assistants or children perceive the mechanisms for gathering their views to be tokenistic, then perhaps they will be less forthcoming with their honest thoughts and this would lead to tokenistic voice and there would be insignificant progress towards school improvement.

During interviews with non-school council members, it was evident that children were aware of not being consulted and having their views listened to. Unfortunately, non-school council members may represent 95% of a school's population and it is therefore particularly significant if their voices are not being facilitated. Messiou (2006) highlights pupil voice as a catalyst for inclusion, with children-as-researchers and the school council providing clear examples of this. Ryan (2009) further suggests that actively seeking and learning from the voice of children is an inclusive process in itself. Cycles one and two provide evidence that some teachers found the task of consulting with children a difficult and time-consuming activity. Other challenges were cited such as busy timetables, dealing with behaviour and raising attainment. Allan (2010) and Glazzard (2011) highlight how inclusion can be challenged by an 'economically driven imperative to raise achievement' (Allan, 2010: 206) but this renders children powerless. Inclusion within schools is frequently focused on children who require additional support, but I suggest that this notion should also include voice. The entitlement to voice must be inclusive of all children, irrespective of their age and ability. Similar to particular children requiring additional

support to access the curriculum, many children require additional support to access their entitlement to voice.

Another significant finding of this study involved the absence of active citizenship (Cleaver and Nelson, 2006) as children's voice was mostly a passive affair with limited influence (Lundy, 2007). An overlooked aspect of school council meetings was the reduced emphasis on action taken by children in-between meetings. In practice, this involved a child approaching a member of staff for a final decision on a previous issue raised. Adult support was required to facilitate children having influence and audience (Lundy, 2007) across the school and this may help to reduce tokenism. During meetings, this was reported as 'action since the last meeting'. However, children did not investigate these areas further as the initial responses from staff were regarded as final. Hamill and Boyd (2002: 116) allude to this notion rather succinctly:

...it is important to remember that what they [children] have to say, may or may not correspond to the teacher's viewpoint and experiences. Nonetheless one must acknowledge these perceptions as valid because they are an expression of what the young person believes.

Through careful consideration of the children-as-researchers principles, this area could be developed in a number of ways. For example, if during a school council meeting there were concerns regarding the repeated curriculum content in ICT, then a small group of children could plan how they would investigate this area – e.g. questionnaires to children across a specific year group, discussion with ICT teacher, headteacher and comparison of books. This would help in ascertaining whether these were the collective views of other children and would also empower children as active-citizens. These could involve a merging of school council and research skills training (Avieson, 2012). It is likely that data collected in this manner would be more positively received by individual members of staff, as they may be more convinced that there is substance to such a claim.

School council information was disseminated through children reporting back to classes and minutes from meetings being distributed to staff. However, teaching assistants expressed their concerns, as unlike all teaching staff, they had not been given access to the school council minutes in recent years. Although not involving the teaching assistants may

have been a strategic oversight, it is also suggested that their voices were not being listened to. I considered throughout this thesis, if parallels could be made between the way children and teaching assistants have their voices facilitated within a school environment. This area may warrant further investigation.

4.3. Training for children

One of the key components of the children-as-researchers initiative was the specific training which children received, as this provided the necessary research skills to investigate personal areas of interest (Kellett, 2011). The long-term sustainability of active citizenship was raised during the pilot study and parallels have also been made with school council training. The study reported here suggests that children involved in gathering the views of others, disseminating information, actively engaging in meetings and discussing important issues, may require training about their participation rights and the specific skills required; a view supported by Rudduck and Fielding (2006). Hart's (1992) ladder refers to 'tokenism', where children are asked to give their views about an issue, but have limited scope of the areas they can express on. This study attests to such tokenism as children were not supported in giving their views on important issues, such as teaching and learning. This type of tokenism may be common in other schools where the establishment of a school council is considered sufficient in facilitating pupil voice.

Children in Scotland and Edinburgh University (2010b) discovered that 50% of all school councillors across 32 local authorities did not receive any formal training and this was regarded as critically important to the overall effectiveness of school councils. School council training may also develop the roles of school councillors and the responsibilities this brings, providing a more informed form of participation. 'Schools Councils UK' provide a range of documents focused around these areas and specific resources were purchased to support school councillors during cycle two. However, the purchase and implementation of school council training resources required adult intervention. Shier's (2001) model of participation emphasised the collaborative involvement of adults and children being aware of their rights may be insufficient without specific support from adults. Without the appropriate support, children's ability to 'act as participants' may be hindered (Skelton, 2008). Devine (2002) outlined the control of time, space and

interactions and it is therefore the adults within a school setting who may influence the amount, frequency and type of school council training. These attitudes may be of individual staff members or institutional practice. The headteacher acknowledged in cycle two that the school council training should have taken place much earlier, but this did not address why training had not been previously considered. There is less clarity on the on-going training requirements, or how school council training should be structured throughout the year. It may be difficult to have too much training earlier in the year as children are establishing routines and relationships in new classes. However, children may benefit from understanding their roles, prior to subsequent meetings. In the study reported here, three hours of school council training was facilitated prior to the first school council meeting and these focused on the roles and participation rights of children. An unforeseen outcome of providing children with school council training was the additional time required in meetings to cover all agenda items, a view supported by Cotmore (2004). Training for children therefore required support from senior staff, alongside the allocation of resources and space within the school timetable.

One of the significant improvements as a result of school council training involved the increase in teaching and learning discussions. Although agenda changes may have also contributed towards this, it was evident that children were more confident in raising issues around teaching and learning. Children became increasingly aware of their roles and responsibilities and this had a positive effect on children's confidence, a view supported by Furlong (2010). While the additional responsibilities of the roles of chair, secretary and school council teacher were not explored in depth in this study, findings indicate that these roles provide opportunities for increased responsibility and empowerment. The cost and resources required for school council training were minimal, but it was also feasible that in the future, children could train others in the skills required. Identification of 'key skills required' to be an effective school councillors have not been highlighted by 'Schools Councils UK', but 'Pupil Voice Wales', suggested that an effective school council must:

- Represent all pupils and include as many people as possible.
- Take time to listen to all pupils and communicate their views.
- Feedback to pupils about what happened about their views.
- Make things happen – or explain why they can't! (PVW, 2012)

It was evident from the study reported here that children required adult support to be effective in addressing their role as school councillor. It was also suggested that adult awareness of these issues influenced the levels of children's participation and subsequent impact upon school improvement. The greatest responsibility therefore rests with the headteacher, although this role is evidently faced with a range of other challenges.

The focus of this section has been on the training for children, although the school council teacher also reported during cycle two, that her knowledge had improved as a result of the School Council UK resources. The training and skills of the school council leader were not explored in sufficient depth, but have been previously recognised as influential (Maitles and Deuchar, 2006). Hart (2010) also highlighted the importance of rights training for those that educate children. Furthermore, Children in Scotland and Edinburgh University (2010c: 1) suggested:

The success of most pupil councils is notably dependent upon the pivotal role of the adult advisor and/or how the adult advisor perceives the council and treats the individual council members.

The study further suggested that adult advisors take on the role of advisor for two reasons – 'they have an interest in pupil participation and/or it fits within their school remit'. (Children in Scotland and Edinburgh University, 2010c: 9). Both of these assertions highlight the important role of headteachers in selecting an appropriate adult to organise the school council, but also raises issues around the type of motivation and skills required to run an effective school council. Of significance is the headteacher's admission in this thesis, that the school councillor lead role does not come with financial incentive or acknowledged leadership role.

4.4. Support from senior staff

The study reported here suggests that frameworks and support from senior staff are required during all stages of school council formation and development. Data further indicates that support from senior staff is more likely if explicit links are made between pupil voice and school improvement. The responsibility for evaluating pupil voice

mechanisms, such as the school council agenda, may or not directly involve the headteacher. However, this thesis highlights that headteacher support is one of the most influential factors on pupil voice.

Throughout the study reported here, there were significant differences in the perceived purposes of pupil voice amongst adults and children. As a result of the interventions, it emerged that being explicit to all staff and children on the aims and purposes of the school council was beneficial in encouraging an institutional approach to pupil voice. Without such aims, it would be difficult to ensure there was a collective agreement from staff or children regarding mechanisms to support pupil voice. Consequently, devising clear aims of the school council through consultation with children and staff may be a useful strategy in improving the efficacy of children's voice and reducing tokenistic processes. This responsibility may rest with headteachers, as Bush (2011) highlights how educational leaders can establish and develop their own 'values and vision' across the school. Although the personal values and motivations of headteachers will always differ, it is important that headteachers understand how pupil voice can influence school improvement. Rudduck and Fielding (2006: 219) confirmed this assertion and suggested that schools may focus on 'how to do it' rather than 'why we might do it'.

During cycle two, a training session with all staff on the UNCRC and purposes of the school council was aimed at 'why we might do it'. Supporting other data, some staff appeared aware of the intended aims of the school council, but made explicit the constraints imposed by the timetable and other school commitments. Watts and Youens (2007) suggested that school leadership teams were responsible for supporting pupil voice, but the study reported here suggested that school leadership teams may even hinder the efficacy of children's voice. The responsibility of creating a school council policy or set of aims rests with the headteacher, who inevitably influences the levels of adult and children's participation. Power relations were therefore significant at an institutional level and between adult members of staff (Devine, 2002). Cummins (2009) distinguished between institutional (macro) and individual (micro) power constraints. It may be difficult to isolate each of these in the study reported here, although I suggest that institutional policies on pupil voice mechanisms can be easily influenced through school leadership teams – leading to school improvement. Flutter and Rudduck (2004) highlight the link

between consulting pupils and school improvement and it is likely that an effective school council requires strategic organisation, planning and oversight from the outset. However, unless the significance of school councils is embedded within national policy, then individual headteachers will continue to act as gatekeepers on children's rights.

Unlike English school inspections frameworks such as OFSTED, the Welsh school inspection frameworks have been aligned to monitor and evaluate pupil voice and school councils. This is a particularly useful reference point, as Wales are the only country within the UK to have compulsory school councils. Since 2010, inspectors must consider:

- Whether pupils' views about what and how they learn are taken seriously.
- How pupils discuss the topics covered and help to plan schemes of work and activities.
- Whether pupils make choices about how and what they learn.
- Pupils participation in decision-making, including the effectiveness of the school council.
- The extent to which all pupils, including those from different groups, are involved in making decisions about their life in school.

(Estyn Inspection Guidance, 2010)

The inspection guidance above followed the introduction of compulsory school councils in Wales. Although the introduction of mandatory school councils in England would not automatically lead to improvements in children's voice and school councils, it may lead to changes in school self-evaluation forms and inspection frameworks. This may subsequently lead to more effective strategic planning and evaluations of school councils.

One of my aims at the start and throughout this study was to consider methods of supporting headteachers and school staff. I subsequently considered pragmatic methods of helping schools to support children in light of the current English school system. Consequently, Lundy's (2007) conceptualising of Article 12 can be considered in strategically planning a school council. Whilst constructing this information, I aligned the key issues which have arisen during this study with the relevant academic literature. I was careful to ensure that table provides questions, as opposed to answers. This may allow a

school to consider its own unique context. This is depicted in Figure 4.1 and was devised as a non-exhaustive list of considerations for senior staff.

Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of Article 12	Considerations for school leadership team
Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When will school council meetings take place and how often? • How will meetings be organised, managed, recorded and how will the agenda be determined? • What will the school council voting process be and why? • How will this be facilitated or supported for children with additional needs? • What support will staff require to facilitate this?
Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the views of all children be facilitated, gathered and recorded? • How will this be proactively encouraged? • Who will oversee the school council and why? What skills and training will they receive? • What guidance will be given to all staff on voice? • How will the views of school councillors be facilitated, gathered and recorded? • What additional training for children is required? • How will staff support these processes?
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the views of school councillors be disseminated to others, including: children, governors, teachers, teaching assistants and parents? • How will the views of school councillors be listened to by senior staff? How will this process be recorded and monitored? • How will 'due-weight' be given to the views of school councillors?
Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the measurable impact of school council suggestions? • Where and how is this recorded? • How will school improvement be influenced by the school council? • What significant decisions will the school councillors be consulted upon?

Figure 4.1. Strategic factors for senior staff consideration

Figure 4.1 provides strategic oversight of pupil voice within a school council context, but also embeds school improvement as an underlying focus. If these issues are monitored and evaluated throughout the school year then some of the barriers to children's voice and

participation would be overcome. Figure 4.1 depicts a productive use of the headteachers power and influence within schools. The aims of a school council must be determined by the unique context and ethos of the individual school through consultation with all stakeholders. The premise of children's rights, voice, empowerment and active citizenship must be considered carefully, prior to any strategic decisions regarding the organisation and management of the school council. Each action-research cycle has demonstrated that children benefit significantly, when provided with appropriate adult support and the necessary skills to engage as active citizens. This training and support impacts upon pupil voice, school council effectiveness and school improvement.

In reflecting on the findings of this thesis, there are numerous limitations to this study to consider and generalizations are necessarily limited as discussed in the next section.

4.5. Limitations

A significant limitation during the children-as-researchers phase, involved the number of children involved and additional time pressures. It could be argued that the six children selected may not have represented the typical school community and this may have influenced the data. Equally, only six group interviews were conducted with children during cycles two and three. I acknowledge that the small number of children may have slanted the data, although I am equally satisfied that the data collection methods were appropriate at the time especially considering I was also working as a practitioner. As data collection was over a period of almost three academic years, I became aware that issues raised early in the research process may not be as pertinent towards the end. For example, interviews with non-school council members were conducted in the autumn term and if these had been later in the year, some children may have had more positive experiences of the school council. This limitation also made me reflect upon my own experiences and if carrying out the same investigations later in my career may have influenced the study. What is evident is that data from this thesis captured a particular moment in time and although interventions followed this process, the schools proved to be very fluid and dynamic places.

The pilot study and two action research cycles were conducted within the narrow context of two unique English schools. It is therefore plausible that the issues outlined within this discussion chapter are not significant issues in other schools. School B was based in Tower Hamlets, East London and all children were Bangladeshi in origin and 100% had EAL. There were observable differences in the way children from this community interacted with adults in schools, compared to my previous rural school in Suffolk. As a result, what I perceived as passive pupil voice and an ineffective school council may have been influenced by some of the cultural differences. I did reflect throughout cycle two on the ethical considerations of encouraging Bengali children within an English state school, to speak out and on occasions, challenge adult perspectives. However, I reflected that all children in all English primary schools were entitled to exercise voice and I did not want to shut down the potential to engage children in school improvement initiatives. The middle way was to proceed with caution and ensure due respect for cultural boundaries was constantly considered. However, I fully acknowledge that the cultural differences may have influenced adult-child power relations, willingness to engage in pupil voice and the subsequent data from this thesis.

This thesis has resulted in more questions than answers and simply provides some thoughts for consideration. I was extremely fortunate to have supportive headteachers in both schools and this allowed me to conduct my research and make numerous modifications. However, a limitation of this was the influence that my headteacher and I had on participants. For example, during cycle two I delivered staff training on children's rights and was supported by the headteacher. To some colleagues, this may have been a little oppressive and could have influenced interviews and other staff responses. Equally, asking the school council teacher to implement particular interventions was also influenced by my role as assistant headteacher. It is likely that despite the positive power influences I had upon school B, my role also influenced how staff and children responded to me. This may have influenced the data collected and issues analysed in further depth.

4.6. Summary and significant findings

In support of Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of Article 12, children in this study were restricted in their space, voice, audience and influence. All of these factors were influenced

through the actions of adults and with limited evidence of impact. Without adult support, evidence from the study reported here suggested that children’s views did not significantly influence school improvement. The interventions of school council training, log books, agenda changes and support from senior staff improved the overall efficacy of the school council, but highlighted other factors for consideration. The significant findings of this thesis are summarised in Figure 4.2 and further questions which emerge from these findings are discussed in the conclusion chapter.

	Significant findings from this thesis
1.	The headteacher was not fully aware of the impact of the school council and despite willingness, there was no evidence of strategic oversight or plans for development.
2.	The adult leading the school council received limited training and development prior to the intervention.
3.	The agenda items were created by the headteacher with little input from children. Time was a restricting factor during school council meetings.
4.	Children benefited from training on their roles and responsibilities as school councillors.
5.	Interactions between individual school councillors and staff across the school varied, but children had no further avenues of redress.
6.	The school council was not always effective at gathering the collective views of all children, particularly the non-school council members.

Figure 4.2. Significant findings from this thesis

Finally, it was important to consider the impact of this research on my own professional practice. Although all research cycles have included reflections of each particular phase of research and how my professional role influenced the research process, it was also imperative that I considered how my own practice has developed, as a result of the research process. Therefore, before articulating the conclusions, the penultimate chapter presents further reflections on my own development and the impact of EdD research on my personal and professional practice.

Chapter Five

Professional Development

Chapter Five

It has taken almost four years to complete my Doctorate in Education and I have also changed roles within that time. It is difficult to separate my professional development which would have occurred throughout my natural career progression and from the changes which were influenced by my EdD. I have come to the conclusion that both of these are interlinked, although I will attempt to separate some of the key issues. This chapter will outline how my professional identity has influenced the research and how my research has influenced my professional practice.

5.1. Professional development

Each of the three research cycles has raised personal and professional issues which have influenced this study. My own reflections have frequently mirrored my professional role and requirements, from initially lacking in confidence and being overly concerned with the thoughts of colleagues, to eventually progressing to a senior leadership position and setting my own high expectations of myself and others. This process has provided me with greater insight into my own values and beliefs and how these influence my daily decisions. My initial motivation to research children's rights was founded within my own personal experiences and aligned with my initial reasons for becoming a teacher. I have since realised the significant responsibilities incumbent upon adults working with children and how these act as a moral compass in making challenging decisions. This study has demonstrated to me the complex nature of school settings and numerous variables are constantly influencing every decision. The ever-shifting and ever-fluid circumstances faced by schools demonstrate changing and complex processes. The fluidity of schools has been challenging to capture within one study. In conjunction with my role as assistant headteacher, an appreciation of the complexities faced by senior staff became apparent during cycle one and two of this study. This helped me to create a more empathetic and less critical outlook of schools where pupil voice could be more effective and represented a significant shift in my own perspective. This led to an acceptance that subtle and pragmatic improvements were a stepping stone to improving the efficacy of school councils and subsequent improvement to the school. This was something which could be achieved

through simple and effective methods, but required an 'adult' catalyst and a questioning approach.

Throughout this study, I noticed my increased awareness of professional and research relationships with colleagues, raising the issue of adult voice. These reflections developed following an interview with teaching assistants, who expressed a range of other personal and professional concerns. I also became aware of possible parallels between children's voice and adult voice within a school setting. For example, I considered whether the power relations and levels of democracy exhibited between adults across the school were also mirrored in the adult-child power relations and subsequent efficacy of the school council. Equally, I pondered whether the school council provided a glimpse into the overall culture and democracy of a school. These thoughts led me to the dangers of imposing recommendations to adults or school leaders as, similar for children, adults should be involved in the process as active citizens and their right to voice was of equal significance. This insight ensured that during my discussion and conclusion chapters, I was careful to provide questions as guidance on pupil voice, as opposed to definitive statements of how it should be done.

During cycles two and three, I became increasingly aware of the limitations of this study and the specific school context which was under investigation. The findings may therefore not be representative of other school councils. Although it was my intention to visit other school councils during the early stages of my research, this did not occur due to other school pressures and priorities. Equally, the small sampling of children for group interviews may not have represented the views of all children across the school. The main limitation throughout this study was my own desire to improve the school council's effectiveness and this may have led me to be overly critical and judgemental of the processes and procedures. Another issue I became aware of in my research approach was the need to avoid prescribing how adult-child power relations 'should be', particularly as I was employed in a school with 100% Bengali children and there were observable differences in the way the local community functioned, especially compared to my own experiences. Remaining sensitive to cultural and religious beliefs became more important during cycle one and two, but throughout the research process, I remained consistent in supporting the rights to voice – for any child.

Upon further reflection, I considered how the EdD process has impacted upon my professional practice as an assistant headteacher. As a result of my research, colleagues began to openly acknowledge my concern for children's rights and I felt that this complemented my formal management style. This subsequently made me consider how I came across to children and staff and resulted in my specific attempts to be more personable, supportive and empathetic. Parallels can be made between my own attempts to be a more effective practitioner and the development of pupil voice within a school. Both require proactive and small steps which are informed by interactions within the school environment. I therefore intended to consider small but important changes to my professional behaviours. The overriding outcome of this was my increased concern for adults and how senior staff, including myself, did not always listen or act upon the suggestions of all stakeholders – children and adults.

Finally, I significantly under-estimated the changes to my personal and professional roles, as a result of this research process. When I first embarked on this EdD I considered it had a definitive start and finish, but the further I have travelled, the more I realised that the anticipated end point was merely another beginning. I considered the end of my EdD to be the end of my academic development, but it has made me much more inquisitive about the education world around me. This initial research has raised specific questions that I hope to explore further within my professional role. These are outlined in the concluding chapter. The EdD experience has also equipped me with the skills to continually strive to improve my own and others' practice, but most of all to value the contribution that pupil voice can make to realising this aspiration.

The following chapter provides a final conclusion to this thesis, but also suggests a future trajectory based on the research findings and literature. This thesis has provided me with more questions to ask than definitive answers to offer/suggest and these are outlined in a wider context. The concluding chapter also considers my initial rationale and justifications for this research, alongside a description of the professional activities I have been involved with as a result of this research.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Conclusion

This final and concluding chapter aims to revisit my original rationale for this thesis, but within the specific context of my research findings. This section encapsulates the implications of this study for researchers and practitioners and acts as a platform that provides a likely trajectory for future research and my own professional role.

Using a pilot study and a two-cycle action-research approach, this thesis explored the potential of school councils to facilitate pupil voice and school improvement in an English primary school. Data collected during cycles one and two supported my initial assertions that tokenistic pupil voice exists within some primary schools. However, this thesis has highlighted the complex modes in which schools operate and the range of challenges faced by school leaders. The significant findings from this thesis can be situated within Shier's (2001) participation model, as the pragmatic aims have been to improve levels of children's' participation, particularly through their involvement in important decisions which influence their schooling experiences. Data has supported the notion that adult support was required to increase the levels of children's participation, but the findings also indicate that a willingness to improve the school council still requires converting into school policy, which can only result from the deliberate actions of school leaders. Figure 6.1 contains the significant findings from this thesis, alongside future considerations and avenues of research.

A significant finding and personal reflection from this thesis relates to the headteacher being unaware of the overall efficacy of the school council, as this demonstrates that strong leadership and active engagement with the school council processes is required if a school council is to be effective. Furthermore, setting up a school council is not sufficient in itself in enabling pupil voice, a view supported by Wyse (2001). Without this active engagement by school leaders, prioritising the impact of school councils may only be considered if there are reported problems in its efficacy, and this may lead to the presumption that if children are not reporting any concerns, then the school council must be effective. Parallels can equally be drawn with a child not reporting that they don't have a voice, but as Lundy (2007) suggests, adults must take proactive steps to enable the voice

of children. One way to counteract this oversight is for pupil voice mechanisms to form part of the school self-evaluation process, but this is challenged by a range of competing issues which school leaders must also deal with on a daily basis.

Significant findings from this thesis	Significant concepts from this thesis	Avenues for future research
The headteacher was not fully aware of the impact of the school council and despite willingness, there was no evidence of strategic oversight or plans for development.	The importance of headteacher leadership of pupil voice mechanisms, including strategic oversight, staff awareness, monitoring of children's impact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the school's interpretation of Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989)? • How is pupil voice included on the school development plan and how is it monitored? • What training do the headteacher and other staff have on children's rights and pupil voice? • What evidence exists of child-initiated suggestions influencing school improvement?
The adult leading the school council received limited training and development prior to the intervention.	The impact of the adult leading the school council and their status, training, skills and motivation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who leads the school council and why? • How do school council leaders influence senior staff? • What additional training, skills and experience do they possess?
The agenda items were created by the headteacher with little input from children. Time was a restricting factor during meetings.	Organisation of school council meetings: the significance of the agenda items, time and facilitating the views of children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who creates the agenda and why? • What whole-school issues are discussed? • How are adult-child power relations considered? • How are all children's voices included within meetings?
Children benefited from training on their roles and responsibilities as school councillors.	The importance of specific and continuous training for all school councillors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What training and skills do children receive on their role as school councillors? • How are children supported in gathering the views of their peers?

Interactions between individual school councillors and staff across the school varied, but children had no further avenues of redress.	Adults support children as active-citizens through listening and responding appropriately to their concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do adults across the school support children in their entitlement to voice? How is this monitored? • When in the school timetable are adults able to discuss child-initiated issues? • Are children involved in all areas of school improvement? • What impact does children's voice make across the school? What is the evidence for this?
The school council was not always effective at gathering the collective views of all children, particularly the non-school council members.	Inclusive right to voice for all children, particularly the voice of non-school council members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the rights and entitlements of all children considered within pupil voice mechanisms? • Does children's behaviour influence entitlement to voice? • What qualities and skills does the school consider to be important for school councillors? • How do non-school councillors communicate with school councillors? Is this monitored?

Figure 6.1. Summary of research findings and future research avenues

A second significant finding from this thesis concerned the voices of non-school council members and how these were incorporated, or not, into the views of school councillors. This demonstrated the dangers of relying on the voices of 18 children as a representative of 450 children and this may be a fundamental flaw within any pupil voice mechanism. Upon reflection, this finding highlights once again the requirement for adult support across the entire school, providing evidence that the school council should not be perceived as a bounded project, as this may be a limiting factor in its subsequent development. The school council meetings may represent one particular time of the week in which designated children and staff meet, but children's involvement in decisions making should exist in many aspects of school life and form part of their experiences as citizens.

The findings from this thesis provided evidence that adults within schools had the most influence on the efficacy of the school council. My own reflections suggested that adults did not intentionally set out to reduce the school council effectiveness or levels of children's participation. On the contrary, all adults appeared positive and responsive to all aspects of exploration and avenues of improvement. Equally, most adults and children appeared to understand the general purposes of the school council. What became evident is that there is a limitation to time, effort and resources which staff can allocate to pupil voice, particularly when considering other school pressures. Whilst this thesis provides no clear solutions to this problem, it does suggest that headteachers can make small changes and these can impact positively on the schooling experiences of children.

School councils act as a direct form of active citizenship and, if effective, can lead to school improvement. School councils can provide a platform for engagement with participation rights, adult-child power relations and pupil voice within schools and therefore have the potential to be transformative in terms of active citizenship and overall school improvement. Developing the link between school improvement and listening to children has been emphasised most extensively by the Welsh Government (Furlong, 2010) and following the introduction of compulsory school councils in 2005, led to modifications in the school self-evaluation process and a revised Welsh school inspections framework (2010). OFSTED (2012) place less emphasis on inspecting participation rights and student councils and focuses on four key areas: teaching, achievement, behaviour and safety and leadership. I do not suggest that changes to inspection frameworks will directly improve the levels of pupil voice and participation within English schools. On the contrary, a prescriptive approach may not suit the individual context of many schools and may simply perpetuate tokenistic representations of voice. What is evident is that this responsibility rests with headteachers and school leaders. Furthermore, Shier's (2001) model of participation and Lundy's (2007) conceptualisation of voice, both provide a rationale for headteachers to draw upon when considering the link between pupil voice and school improvement.

The findings of this study show that headteachers are faced with a host of competing priorities and those efforts to enhance pupil voice have to be managed within the overall context of the school. What I have learned from undertaking this research is that this may

be more effectively achieved by small pragmatic adjustments that are embedded into school council systems that take account of cultural contexts and local school dynamics. Throughout this thesis, I have maintained that small adjustments to pupil voice mechanisms can have a significant impact upon the lives of children and the findings of my research do bear this out.

Figure 6.1 highlights a number of challenging questions for school leaders and practitioners. During the synthesis of this table, I became increasingly aware of the importance of 'monitoring' the above issues, as the strategic responsibility may rest with school leaders. I subsequently considered how the above issues would be received and considered by headteachers and school council leaders of other schools. Fortunately a situation arose in which I was able to apply my EdD research to a different school. My headteacher kindly outlined my research whilst working with another London school, which was struggling to develop its school council processes. This challenge was made more complex due to the primary school being a pupil referral unit for boys with behavioural, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Here, my remit was to provide suggestions on enabling pupil voice within particularly challenging situations. Upon meeting the deputy headteacher, I utilised Figure 6.1 as a starting point for discussions and we considered each of the sections in an applied context. My personal reflections from a day in this school were that the school seemed surprised, yet pleased, that I suggested small adjustments to improve the pupil voice mechanisms rather than sweeping changes. One of the main learning points I take from my EdD is that small, sustainable steps towards improved school effectiveness that acknowledge context and challenges, that work *with* staff rather than against staff resistance and take account of the voice of *all* pupils are more likely to be successful.

During the final stages of my EdD, I was invited to present my research findings at a seminar (Avieson, 2011) at the London campus of the University of Cumbria. This involved working with trainee-teachers and discussing children's rights and pupil voice across London primary schools, with a particular focus on inclusion. Other disseminations have included spending a day supporting a school council leader, who was new to her role, and a presentation of the pilot study at a national conference (Avieson, 2012) at Oxford University. How research informs my practice is evident here and has been at the centre of

my EdD process throughout the last four years. I am significantly more aware of the inter-relatedness of research and practice. As a practitioner, I now convey more confidence and expertise in a range of matters pertaining to pupil voice and school improvement, but I have also gained more experience in managing change from within the contextual challenges of schools.

Finally, I have come to the realisation that completing my EdD is not the end of my research studies, but the beginning of a research journey. This is certainly something I did not anticipate four years ago when I thought I was embarking on a finite project that would improve my practice. The experience of this research has transformed my practice outlook and made me a much more reflective, and hopefully effective, manager. I am determined to build on this and hope to engage in further research around pupil voice and school improvement.

Appendices

Appendix A

Developing an effective school council research study

Dear parent/guardian

As part of my doctoral studies, I would like to explore how we can best develop an effective school council at Hope Primary. Pupils have been invited to share their thoughts on the purposes and functions of our school council. Your son/daughter has expressed an interest in this area and I kindly ask for your consent to involve him/her as a participant in my study. This letter gives further information and guidance.

The purpose of the research is to develop a model for an effective school council that respects children's perspectives and their active participation in school processes. Data will be collected from participants via an anonymous questionnaire about school council effectiveness. Questions will focus on the purposes and benefits of a school council and ways children would like it to be improved. The completion of the questionnaire will not affect other valuable learning in school and pupils will not be disadvantaged in any way.

As part of my research, I would like to be able to observe how pupils engage with this process and also to interview some children in small groups to invite them to add further comments and clarify their responses. Group interviews took place in a school classroom with myself and a teaching assistant present. Questions will only be asked about their views and ideas relating to the school council. I seek your permission to audio record the interviews for the purposes of research. The tapes will be destroyed at the end of my study and all data will be anonymised. Participants will be free to withdraw at any time and for any reason. They will be given an opportunity to listen to the tape, make any changes or withdraw consent. I wish to offer the following assurances:

1. As a qualified teacher and assistant headteacher, I have a full enhanced CRB.
2. Pupil's names and school details will be changed in any data I collect to protect their identity.
3. Interviews with pupils will always be in groups.
4. Pupils will be given support with understanding questions.
5. Pupils' confidentiality will be respected throughout the study and data that they and I collect will be password protected.
6. Pupils and parents have the right to withdraw from this research at any time and without giving any reason.
7. Further information about the project can be provided either by myself(cavieson.211@lgflmail.org), my supervisor Professor Mary Kellett (m.kellett@open.ac.uk), or alternatively, you can speak to the headteacher, Shahana Khytan on 0207 614228.

I am very positive and enthusiastic that this research will allow pupils to improve something of real interest and importance to them. The school council provides a platform for school staff to understand the concerns and interests of children. This research is concerned with listening and respecting children in their own right and as complete citizens.

If you and your son/daughter are happy for him/her to participate in this study, then please could you and your son/daughter sign the attached consent form.

Thank you for your support and assistance

Craig Avieson

Assistant Headteacher

Developing an effective school council research study

Parental consent

I do/do not consent to Craig Avieson conducting research with my son/daughter:..... Class.....

I understand that we can withdraw permission for my son/daughter to be involved in this study at any time and feel sufficiently aware of what will be involved.

I understand how to find out more about the research if I need to.

Signed.....

Date.....

Pupil consent

I do/do not wish to be part of the research project.

I understand what the project is about and that I can withdraw from it at any time and for any reason.

Signed

Date

.....

Appendix B

Do boys receive more pocket money than girls?



By pupil X
And pupil Y



What is research ?

Research is when you try to find out about things that you are curious about. It is important not to lie about your research and be kind to the people are using in your research.

It is important to have evidence to help you answer the questions in your research.

In our research we had to remember to be sceptical. This means you can't trust everything you read. We also had to be ethical to make sure the people we used were happy to take part, and systematic. This means we had to do things step by step.

How we get involved with the research?

We were chosen at random by Mr. Avieson in a group of pupils.

We felt happy that we missed other lessons but we were still learning. Mr Avieson had to ask our parents if we were allowed to take part in his research. Our parents said it was ok to do it and our friends were a bit curious and asked us what we were doing.

How we did it?

We met Mr. Avieson during the week and he told us how to research. He explained how not to lie, be kind to people that we use in our research and not to do anything with them that they didn't want to do.

What we wanted to research

We decided to look at pocket money because we saw something on the news that said men get paid more than women and we wondered whether this was the same at school with pocket money.

What did you expect to be your results?

I expected that girls would get more because girls are better behaved than boys.

Method

- Here are some examples of the questions we used:
 - How much pocket money do you get?
 - Do you get pocket money?
 - Why do you get pocket money?
- Some of the questions we put yes and no answers to because we didn't need a long answer. Some of the questions we put in needed a longer answer because we asked them why.
- The volunteers were 55W. Aged 9-10. Boys and girls.

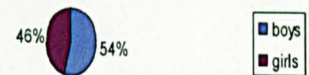
We picked questionnaires because they are easier to give out to lots of people. We did not have time to do an observation or an interview. Questionnaires were good to use because it is easier to get the information from the people and so we don't have as much to write down.

Ethical and confidential considerations

- We said they didn't have to put their name but they could.
- We said we would not tell anybody what they said.
- Anyone who didn't want to do it, didn't have to.
- We kept all answers secret and did not discuss them with anybody else, apart from Mr Avieson.

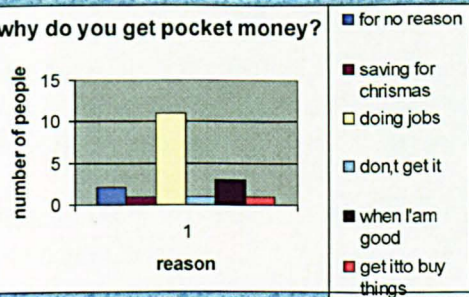
Results

% of boys and girls that receive pocket money



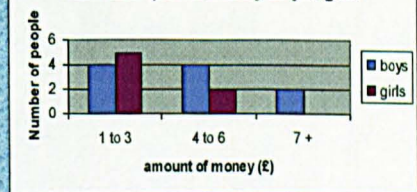
More results

why do you get pocket money?



More results

How much pocket money do you get?



Discussion

- Boys get more money and chores was the most common activity.
- No girls earned over £7 a week, which means parents pay girls less sometimes.
- This could depend on the chores that they do, like washing up.
- A few children were given money to buy christmas presents with, but most children probably use other money for this.

Overall conclusions

Overall boys do get more money but in some acations girls do get more pocket money than boys. Some of the girls got spare coppers. Some boys got ten pounds a week.

Recommendations to school and pupils and me

We would have liked more time to do this study and then we could have asked more children and done some interviews. During interviews, we could have seen if our friends agree with our ideas and asked about the type of chores that are done.

We had to rush our results a bit, but Mr Avieson gave us some help. He definitely learned about doing sceptical and ethical research. I hope we get to do some more soon.

Thanks



Appendix C:

Extract from teaching assistants interview

Initial briefing: Discussions of confidentiality (with exception of child protection concerns), importance of honesty and purpose of interview.

Interviewer: So we are going to have an informal discussion of the school council and how children are initially selected.

Adult A: Well they put their hands up if they are interested in being in the school council and then the class does a vote for them. Which is probably the correct way of doing it.

Adult B: The way we did it was, the children had to go away and prepare a speech and based on their 2 or 3 minute presentations, the rest of the class then vote and decide who will be on the school council. One boy and one girl and we count the votes with them.

Interviewer: the voting system sounds like it is fair. What about the children that are eventually picked for the school council. Are these children typically articulate, bright, and popular?

Adult B: from my experience, the children picked are often much more articulate than other children and they are normally higher ability. I can't think of any low-ability children that have even been selected for the school council and also, it can be a popularity vote too.

Interviewer: are the skills and qualities of a school council member advertised to children. In other words, are these characteristics that children are encouraged to demonstrate?

Adult C: I don't know if I am honest with you. I think that it's often a more popular child and you sometimes know who is popular at that time. I don't think the children are that aware, like you should be a good speaker or listener.

Adult B: the teachers should say that you must be good at listening and speaking and then the children know.

Adult A: sometimes it is good for the children to be socially responsible as a school councillor and it is a shame that they cannot all do it. One boy is a councillor in my class, but I don't see any difference in his confidence or responsibility, he hardly says anything.

Adult B: to be honest, we also don't see what they actually do in the school council, so we cannot always support children either. I can't remember the last time I say the minutes or was informed about the content of one of the meetings. It is very difficult for me to say.

Interviewer: I notice from school council minutes that children do not discuss curriculum, learning and teaching and lesson issues. What are your thoughts?

Adult A: thing is, you can ask children about lessons and what they think, but you have to make sure they understand that it is OK for them to pass comment, but the teacher is not going to respond in a bad way or as if they are being critical. Like I have asked a child how the lesson was and they said it was fine, but I sat one on one with that child all lesson and observed how bored they were and how they could not access most of the lesson. They don't say it, they just sit there being consulted.

Adult B: are children supposed to be consulted on curriculum stuff now, or is it something that is going to be put in place?

Interviewer: schools should consult, but all schools are always aiming to improve what they do. Does the school council have an impact for children?

Adult B: probably because at least they are asked about certain things and they have one way of saying what they think.

Adult C: It is better than nothing, but if they do not talk about lessons and learning, then they are really only having a say about playtime things.

Interviewer: What about the interactions of EAL children with adults in this school? What are the relationships like and do you think it affects children saying what they think?

Adult C: well, I think over the last four years, certain adults talk to children in a certain way. Specific children with specific issues, the consensus sometimes seems to be come down hard on them. Or viewing a child through a microscope and looking at all of their actions and behaviour. So they say, this child is like this all the time, but they are not.

Interviewer: OK, so what you are saying is that some adults have a blanket way of dealing with more difficult children? What do the rest of you think?

Adult D: Yes, it's right. Most staff are really nice to children. But some staff take it really personally when a child misbehaves and carry it over each day. They should let it go and start fresh with the child.

Adult B: Yes, so OK they were a pain yesterday, but they have had the whole night to get over it and today is a new day. We all have bad days and snap sometimes, but children don't understand that, all because of a misunderstanding.

Adult D: there are sometimes teachers that are not confident in dealing with children and if they constantly say to the children that they are stressed or busy, then as a TA and sitting back, you feel helpless. Should a teacher be telling children this? The children get stressed because you are and I don't know how the training goes, but if you are a teacher are there strategies where if you are not feeling great, you use those strategies so you do not let the children know.

Adult C: I know its confidential but it would be nice if we (TA's) knew a few things about children and their backgrounds and then we would feel more comfortable in approaching and working with them. We should be aware and then we would not be so afraid of a situation with a child, whether they are having a bad day or bad home life. Even just a few words would help.

Adult B: I agree with her, because sometimes you feel really guilty. Especially afterwards, you are like while didn't you tell me this yesterday. Like (pupil X) his mum passed away and I did not know. During literacy I asked him about his mum and he did not say anything but I felt really stupid afterwards and felt guilty.

References

References

- Alderson, P. (2000) 'School students' views on school councils and daily life at school', *Children and Society*, **14**, pp. 121-134.
- Alderson, P. (2008) Children as researchers: participation rights and research methods, in Christensen, P. and James, A. *Research with children – perspectives and practices*, New York: Routledge, pp. 276-290.
- Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2004) *Ethics and Social Research with Children and Young People*, Ilford: Barnardos.
- Allan, J. (2010) 'Questions of inclusion in Scotland and Europe', *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, **25**, pp. 199-208.
- Allan, J. and I'Anson, J. (2004) 'Children's rights in school: power, assemblies and assemblages', *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, **12**, pp. 123-138.
- Allan, J., I'Anson, J. Priestley, A. and Fisher, S. (2007) *Promising Rights – Introducing children's rights in schools*. Edinburgh: Save the Children.
- Atkinson, P. and Coffey, A. (1997) Analysing documentary realities, in Silverman, D. (Ed). *Qualitative research, theory, method and practice*. London: Sage Publications.

Avieson, C. (2011) '*Exploring pupil voice in primary schools*'. Invited presentation at the University of Cumbria, London Campus.

Avieson, C. (2012) '*Exploring and reviewing the impact of 'children-as-researchers' on pupil voice and active citizenship*'. Paper presented at the Oxford Ethnography Conference, New College, Oxford University. September 2012.

Barwell, R. (2005) 'Empowerment, EAL and the National Numeracy Strategy', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 8 (4), pp. 313-327.

Bergmark, U. and Kostenius. (2009) 'Listen to me I have something to say: students' participation in research for sustainable school improvement', *Improving Schools*, 12 (3), pp. 249-260.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. and Tight, M. (2002) *How to research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bogdan, R.C. and Biklen, S.K. (2007) *Qualitative research for education: an introduction to theories and methods (5th edition)*. London: Pearson Education.

Boyden, J. and Ennew, J. (1997) *Children in focus: a manual for participatory research with children*, Stockholm: Grafisk Press.

Bragg, S. (2007) 'Student voice' and governmentality: the production of enterprising subjects?', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28 (3), pp. 343 – 358.

British Educational Research Association (BERA). (2004) *Revised ethical guidelines for educational research*. Accessed [online]: <http://www.bera.ac.uk>. (September, 2009).

Brydon-Miller, M. Greenwood, D. and Maguire, P. (2003) Why action research? *Action research*, 1(1), pp. 9-28.

Bryman, A and Teevan, J. (2005) *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bucknall, S (2010) *Children as researchers in English primary schools: developing a model of good practice*. In: British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, 1 – 4 September 2010, University of Warwick, UK.

Burgess, H., Sieminski, S. and Arthur, L. (2007) *Achieving your doctorate in education*. London: Sage Publications.

Bush, T. (2011) *Theories of Educational Leadership and management*. London: Sage Publications.

Chamberlain, T., Golden, S. and Bergeron, C. (2011) *Children and young people's views of educational policy*. London: National Foundation for Educational Research.

Chandler, D. and Torbet, B. (2003) 'Transforming inquiry and action: interweaving 27 flavours of action research', *Action Research*, 1(2), pp. 133-152.

Children in Scotland and University of Edinburgh (2010a) *Having a say at school research briefing paper 1*, pp. – 1 – 11. Accessed [online]: <http://www.havingasayatschool.org.uk/documents/HASASResearchBriefing1--April2010.pdf> (August, 2012)

Children in Scotland and University of Edinburgh (2010b) *Having a say at school research briefing paper 2*, pp. 1 – 10. Accessed [online]: <http://www.havingasayatschool.org.uk/documents/HASASResearchBriefing2--April2010.pdf> (August, 2012)

Children in Scotland and University of Edinburgh (2010c) *Having a say at school research briefing paper 3*, pp. 1 – 12. Accessed [online]: <http://www.havingasayatschool.org.uk/documents/HASASResearchBriefing3--April2010.pdf> (August, 2012)

Cleaver, E. and Nelson, J. (2006) 'Active citizenship: from policy to practice', *Education Journal*, **98**, pp. 34-37.

Clough, P. and Nutbrown, C. (2002) *A student's guide to methodology*. London: Sage Publications.

Cohen, E. (2005) 'Neither seen nor heard: children's citizenship in contemporary democracies', *Citizenship Studies*, **9** (2), pp. 221-240.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007) *Research methods in education* (6th edition). London: Routledge.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011) *Research methods in education* (7th edition). London: Routledge.

Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (2002) *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*. UN?CRC/C/15/add.34. Geneva: United Nations.

Conteh, J. (2007) 'Opening Doors to Success in Multilingual Classrooms: bilingualism, code switching and the professional identities of ethnic minority primary teachers', *Language and education*, 21 (6), pp. 457-472.

Cotmore, R. (2004) 'Organisational competence: the study of a school council in action', *Children and Society*, 18, pp. 53-65.

Cox, S. and Robinson-Pant, A. (2005) 'Challenging perception of school councils in the primary school', *Education*, pp. 3-13.

Creswell, J.W. (1998) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Crick Report (1998) Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of democracy in Schools. QCA. Accessed [online]: http://www.qcda.gov.uk/libraryAssets/media/6123_crick_report_1998.pdf (June, 2010)

Cummins, J. (2000) *Language, power and pedagogy: bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Cummins, J. (2009) 'Pedagogies of choice: challenging coercive relations of power in classrooms and communities', *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 12 (3), pp. 261-271.

Davey, C. (2009) *Get Ready for Geneva – What do they know?* Children's Rights Alliance for England. Accessed [online]: <http://www.getreadyforchange.org.uk> (October, 2010)

DfES (2005) *Higher Standards, better schools for all*. Accessed [online]: <http://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect//633/633.pdf> (August, 2010)

DCSF (2009) *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system*. Accessed [online]: http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/s2st_century_Schools_Summary.pdf (August, 2010)

De Vaus, D. (2001) *Research design in social research*. London: Sage Publications.

Devine, D. (2002) 'Children's citizenship and the structuring of adult-child relations in the primary school', *Childhood*, 9 (3), pp. 303-321.

Devine, D. (2003) *Children, Power and Schooling: How Childhood is Structured in the Primary School*, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Education Scotland (2012a) *Curriculum for Excellence*. Accessed [online]:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/index.asp>

Education Scotland (2012b) *Education for Citizenship*. Accessed [online]:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/> (July, 2012)

Estyn Inspection Guidance (2010) Accessed [online]:

<http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/inspection/inspection-guidance/> (March, 2012)

Fielding, M. (2001) 'Students as radical agents of change', *Journal of Educational Change*, 2, pp. 123-141.

Fielding, M. (2004) 'Transformative approaches to student voice: theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities', *British Educational Research Journal*, 30 (2), pp. 295-311.

Fielding, M. and Bragg, S. (2003) *Students as Researchers: Making a Difference*, Cambridge, Pearson Publishing.

Flutter, J. and Rudduck, J. (2004) *Consulting pupils: what's in it for schools?* London: Routledge.

Fontana, A. and Frey, J.H. (2000) The interview – from structured questions to negotiated text, in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. *Handbook of Qualitative Research: second edition*. London: Sage Publications, pp. 645-672.

Franklin, B. (1997) The Ladder of participation in matters concerning children, in: Boyden, J. and Ennew, J. *Children in focus: a manual for participatory research with children*, Stockholm: Grafisk Press.

Fraser, S. and Robinson, C. (2004) 'Paradigms and philosophy' In Fraser, S., Lewis, V., Ding, S, Kellett, M. and Robinson, C. *Doing Research with Children and Young People*. London: Sage Publications. pp. 59 – 78.

Frost, R. (2007) 'Developing the skills of seven- and eight-year-old researchers: a whole class approach', *Educational Action Research*, 15 (3), pp. 441-458.

Furlong, J. (2010) The teaching and learning research programme in Wales: *Improving learning by taking account of learners' perspectives*. Oxford: Wels Assembly Government.

Gay, L.R., Mills, G.E. and Airasian, P. (2006) *Educational Research – competencies for analysis and applications*. London: Pearson Education Ltd.

Glazzard, J. (2011) 'Perceptions of the barriers to effective inclusion in one primary school: voices of teachers and teaching assistants', *British Journal of Learning Support*, 26 (2), pp. 56-63.

Gordon, M. (2010) 'Student voice key to unlocking key educational practices' *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, Spec issue: Aug 2010 Accessed [online]: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED527226> (June 2012).

Hallinger, P. and Heck, R.H. (2011) 'Exploring the journey of school improvement: classifying and analyzing patterns of change in school improvement processes and learning outcomes, *School effectiveness and school improvement*, 22 (1), pp. 1 - 127.

Hamill, P. and Boyd, B. (2002) 'Equity, fairness and rights - the young person's voice', *British Journal of Special Education*, 29 (3), pp. 111-117.

Hart, R. (1992) *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*, Florence, UNICEF.

Hart, J. (2010) *Rights Respecting Schools – the emerging evidence about impact and implications for teacher education*, paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference, Warwick, September, 2010.

Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. New York, NY: Routledge

Hill, M., Davis, J., Prout, A., and Tisdall, K. (2004) 'Moving the participation agenda forward', *Children and Society*, 18, pp. 77-96.

Holland, S., Renold, E., Ross, J.N and Hillman, A. (2010) 'Power, agency and participatory agendas: A critical exploration of young people's engagement in participative qualitative research', *Childhood*, 17 (3), pp. 360-375.

HMSO (2003) *Every Child Matters* green paper, London: HMSO.

HMSO (2004) *Children's Act*, London: HMSO.

James, A., Jenks, C. and Prout, A. (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

James, A. and Prout, A. (1990) *Constructing and reconstructing childhood*, Basingstoke: Falmer Press.

James, A.L. and James, A. (2004) *Constructing Childhood: Theory, Policy and Social Practice*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

John, M. (2003) *Children's Rights and Power: Charging up for a New Century*, London and New York: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Joyce, B. and Showers, B. (2002) 'Student achievement through staff development (3rd Ed.)', Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Judah, M.L. and Richardson, G.H. (2006) 'Between a rock and a (very) hard place', *Action research*, 4(1), pp. 65-80.

Kellett, M. (2005a) 'Children as researchers: a new research paradigm for the 21st century?' Accessed [online]: http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/research/outputs/publications/methods_review/MethodsReviewPaperNCRM-003.pdf (December, 2009)

Kellett, M. (2005b) *How to develop children as researchers*. London: SAGE Publications.

Kellett, M. (2009). Children as researchers: issues, impact and contribution to knowledge. In: Counting Children. In: *2nd International Conference of Child Indicators*, 3-5 Nov 2009, Sydney, Australia.

Kellett, M. (2010) 'Small shoes, big steps! Empowering children as researchers', *American Journal Of Community Psychology*, 46, pp. 195-203.

Kellett, M. (2011). *Engaging Children and Young People. Centre for Children and Young People. Background Briefing Series*, no.3. Lismore: Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University.

Kellett, M., Forrest, R., Dent, N. and Ward, S. (2004) 'Just teach us the skills please, we'll do the rest: empowering ten-year-olds as active researchers', *Children and Society*, 18, pp. 1-15.

Kellett, M. Robinson, C. and Burr, R (2004) Images of Childhood in Fraser, S., Lewis, V., Ding, S, Kellett, M. and Robinson, C. *Doing Research with Children and Young People*, London: SAGE Publications, pp. 27-42.

Kirby, P. and Gibbs, S. (2006) 'Facilitating participation: adults' caring supporting roles within child-to-child projects in schools and after-school settings', *Children and Society*, 20 (3), pp. 209-222.

Koutselini, M. (2008) 'Participatory teacher development at schools', *Action Research*, 6(1), pp. 29-48.

Lansdown, G. (2004) *Evolving capacities and participation*, International Institute for Child Rights and Development. Accessed [online]:

[http://www.iicrd.org/cap/files/CApevolving\)0.pdf](http://www.iicrd.org/cap/files/CApevolving)0.pdf) (September, 2010)

Lee, N.J. (2009) *Achieving your professional doctorate*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Lister, R., Smith, N., Middleton, S. and Cox, L. (2003) 'Young people talk about citizenship: empirical perspectives on theoretical and political debate', *Citizenship Studies*, 7 (2), pp. 235-253.

Lister, R. (2006) 'Children and citizenship', *Childright*, 223, pp. 22-25.

Lundy, L. (2007) 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, *British Educational Research Journal*, 33 (6), pp. 927-942.

Lyon, C.M. (2007) 'Interrogating the concentration on the UNCRC instead of the ECHR in the development of children's rights in England', *Children and Society*, 21, pp. 147-153.

Maitles, H. and Deuchar, R. (2006) 'We don't learn democracy, we live it!' Consulting the pupil voice in Scottish Schools', *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 1 (3), pp. 249-266.

Maitles, H. (2010) 'Children's initiatives and pupil values: a case study of one Scottish school's experience, *Educational Review*, 62 (4), pp. 391-406.

Maxwell, J.A. (2005) *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach (second edition)*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2002) *Action research: principles and practice (2nd edition)*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Messiou, K. (2006) 'Understanding marginalisation in education: the voice of children, *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 11 (3), pp. 305 – 318.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, M. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis, an expanded sourcebook*. London: Sage.

MOOSA-MITHA, M. (2005) 'A difference-centred alternative to theorization of children's citizenship rights', *Citizenship Studies*, 9 (4), pp.269-388.

Moran-Ellis, J. (2010) *Reflections on the sociology of childhood in the UK*, London: Sage Publications.

Morrow, V. (1999) 'We are people too': children's and young people's perspectives on children's rights and decision-making in England', *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 7, pp. 149-170.

National College of School Leadership (2011). Accessed [online]:

<http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/professional-development/npqh.htm> (July, 2011)

Oates, J. (2006) Ethical frameworks for research with human participants, in Potter, S. (Ed) *Doing post graduate research. (2nd edition)*. London: Sage Publications.

OFSTED (2009) *Framework for the inspection of maintained schools*. Accessed [online]: www.ofsted.gov.uk/new-2009-framework (September, 2010)

OFSTED (2012) *Framework for the inspection of maintained schools*. Accessed [online]: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/framework-for-school-inspection-january-2012> (March, 2012).

Osler, A. and Starkey, H. (2006) 'Education for democratic citizenship: a review of research, policy and practice 1995-2005', *Research Papers in Education*, **21** (4), pp. 433-466.

Percy-Smith, B. & Thomas, N. (Eds). (2010). *A handbook of children and young people's participation perspectives. from theory and practice*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Powell, M.A. and Smith, A.B. (2009) 'Children's Participation Rights in Research', *Childhood*, **16** (1), 124-142.

Pupil Voice Wales. Accessed [online]: <http://www.pupilvoicewales.org.uk/> (March, 2012)

QCDA: Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, (2009). Accessed [online]: <http://www.qcda.gov.uk> (August, 2010)

Reason, P and Bradbury, H. (2008) *Action research: participative inquiry and practice*. London: Sage Publications.

Reid, K., Challoner, C., Lancett, A., Jones, G., Rhysart, G. and Challoner, S. (2010) 'The views of primary pupils at Key Stage 2 on school behaviour in Wales', *Educational Review*, 62 (1), pp. 97 - 113.

'Research Ethics Framework', (2006) *Economic and Social Research Council*. Accessed [online]: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk> (September, 2010)

Reynaert, D., Bouverne-De Bie, M. and Vandeveld, S. (2009) 'A Review of Children's Rights Literature since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', *Childhood*, 16 (4), pp. 518-534.

Robinson, V.M.J., Lloyd, C.A. and Rowe, K.J. (2008) 'The impact of leadership on student outcomes', *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44, pp. 635-674.

Rubin, H.J. and Rubin, I.S. (2004) *Qualitative Interviewing: the art of hearing data (2nd edition)*. London: Sage Publications.

Rudduck, J. and Fielding, M. (2006) 'Student voice and the perils of popularity', *Educational Review*, 58 (2), pp. 219-231.

Ryan, D. (2009) 'Inclusion is more than a place – exploring pupil views and voice in Belfast schools through visual narrative', *British Journal of Special Education*, 36 (2), pp. 77-84.

Safford, K. and Hancock, R. (2011) 'Approaches to small-scale enquiry and research in primary schools'. In Safford, K. Stacey, M. and Hancock, R. *Small-scale Research in Primary school*, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 7 – 11.

School Councils UK. Accessed [online]: <http://www.hrweb.org.legal/child/html>. (August, 2011).

Scott, J. (1990) *A matter of record*. Cambridge: Polity.

Schwandt, T.A (2001). Three epistemological stances for qualitative enquiry: interpretivism, hermeneutics and social constructivism. In Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. New York: Sage.

Shier, H. (2001) 'Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations', *Children and Society*, 15, pp. 107-117.

Silverman, D. (2006) *Interpreting Qualitative Data – methods for analysing talk, text and interaction (3rd edition)*. London: SAGE Publications.

Sinclair, R. (2004) 'Participation in practice: making it meaningful, effective and sustainable', *Children and Society*, 18 (2), pp. 106-118.

- Skelton, T. (2008) 'Research with children and young people: exploring the tensions between ethics, competence and participation'. *Children's Geographies*, 6 (1), pp. 21-36.
- Smith, K. (2011) 'producing governable subjects: images of childhood old and new'. *Childhood*, 19 (1), pp. 24-37.
- Stake, R.E. (2000) 'Case studies'. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2000). *Handbook of Qualitative Research: second edition*. London: Sage Publications.
- Thomas, N. (2007) 'Towards a theory of children's participation', *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 15, pp. 199-218.
- Thomson, P, Gunter, H. (2006) 'From consulting pupils to pupils as researchers: a situated case narrative', *British Educational Research Journal*, 32 (6), pp. 839-856.
- Thornberg, R. (2010) 'School democratic meetings: pupil control discourse in disguise', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, pp. 924-932.
- Thorne, B. (2002) 'From Silence into voice: bringing children more fully into knowledge'. *Childhood*, 9 (3), pp. 251-254.
- Thoonen, E.J., Slegers, P.J., Ort, F.G. and Peetsma, T.D. (2012) 'Building school-wide capacity for improvement: the role of leadership, school organizational conditions, and teacher factors', *School effectiveness and school improvement*, 23 (4), pp. 441-460.

Treseder, P. (1997) *Empowering Children and Young People*, London: Save the Children.

Tripp, D. (2003) *Action enquiry. Action Research e-reports*. Accessed [online]: <http://www2.fhs.usyd.edu.au/arow/arcr/017.htm#Distinguishing%20action%20research>. (November, 2010)

United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, UN General Assembly, Document A/RES/44/25. Accessed [online]: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm> (August, 2012)

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2007) Report card 7, Child poverty in perspective: an overview of child well-being in rich countries. Accessed [online]: http://www.unicef.org.uk/publications/detail.asp?pub_id=124 (October, 2010).

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2009) Accessed [online]: <http://www.unicef.org.uk> (October, 2009).

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2012) Accessed [online]: <http://www.unicef.org.uk/rrsa>. (April, 2012).

Uprichard, E. (2008) 'Children as being and becomings': children, childhood and temporality', *Children and Society*, **22**, pp. 303-313.

Watts, R. and Youens, B. (2007) 'Harnessing the potential of pupils to influence school development', *Improving Schools*, **10** (1), pp. 18-28.

Whitty, G. and Wisby, E. (2007) *Real Decision Making? School Councils in Action*, Research report DCSF RR001 [online]. Accessed [online]:
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research> (November, 2010)

Wolcott, H.F. (1994) *Transforming qualitative data*. Thousand oaks, CA: sage Publications.

Wyse, D. (2001) 'Felt tip pens and school councils: children's participation rights in four English schools', *Children and Society*, **15**, pp. 209-218.

Yamashita, H. and Davies, L (2010) 'Students as professional. The London Secondary School Councils Action Research Project'. In Percy-Smith, B. & Thomas, N. (Eds). *A handbook of children and young people's participation perspectives. from theory and practice*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 230 -239.

Yin, R.K. (2008) *Case study research: design and methods*. London: Sage Publications.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1996) *New directions in action research*. London: Falmer.